DADDY'S GIRL

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Susie Watson.
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DADDY'S GIRL

BY

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"Polly, Sweet Girl Graduate," Etc.

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DADDY'S GIRL

CHAPTER I.

Philip Ogilvie and his pretty wife were quarrelling, as their custom was, in the drawing-room of the great house in Belgrave Square, but the Angel in the nursery upstairs knew nothing at all about that. She was eight years old, and was, at that critical moment when her father and mother were having words which might embitter all their lives, and perhaps sever them for ever, unconsciously and happily decorating herself before the nursery looking-glass.

The occasion was an important one, and the Angel's rosebud lips were pursed up in her anxiety, and her dark, pretty brows were somewhat raised, and her very blue eyes were fixed on her own charming little reflection.

"Shall it be buttercups, or daisies, or both?" thought the Angel to herself.

A box of wild flowers, which had come up from the country that day, lay handy. There were violets and primroses, and quantities of buttercups and daisies, amongst these treasures.

"Mother likes me when I am pretty, father likes me anyhow," she thought, and then she stood and contemplated herself, and pensively took up a bunch of daisies and held them against her small, slightly flushed cheek, and then tried the effect of the buttercups in her golden-brown hair. By-and-by, she skipped away from the looking-glass, and ran up to a tall, somewhat austere lady, who was seated at a round table, writing busily.

"What do you want, Sibyl? Don't disturb me now," said this individual.

"It is only just for a moment," replied the Angel, knitting her brows, and standing in such a position that she excluded all light from falling on the severe-looking lady's writing-pad.

"Which is the prettiest, buttercups or daisies, or the two twisted up together?" she said.

"Oh, don't worry me, child, I want to catch this post. My brother is very ill, and he'll be so annoyed if he doesn't hear from me. Did you say buttercups and daisies mixed? Yes, of course, mix them, that is the old nursery rhyme."

The little Sibyl stamped a small foot encased in a red shoe with an impatient movement, and turned once more to contemplate herself in the glass. Miss Winstead, the governess, resumed her letter, and a clock on the mantelpiece struck out seven silvery chimes.

"They'll be going in to dinner; I must be very quick indeed," thought the child. She began to pull out the flowers, to arrange them in little groups, and presently, by the aid of numerous pins, to deck her small person.

"Mother likes me when I am pretty," she repeated softly under her breath, "but father likes me anyhow." She thought over this somewhat curious problem. Why should father like her anyhow? Why should mother only kiss her and pet her when she was downright pretty?

"Do I look pretty?" she said at last, dancing back to the governess's side.

Miss Winstead dropped her pen and looked up at the radiant little figure. She had contrived to tie some of the wild flowers together, and had encircled them round her white forehead, and mixed them in her flowing locks, and here, there, and everywhere on her white dress were bunches of buttercups and daisies, with a few violets thrown in.

"Do I look pretty?" repeated Sibyl Ogilvie.

"You are a very vain little girl," said Miss Winstead. "I won't tell you whether you look pretty or not, you ought not to think of your looks. God does not like people who think whether they are pretty or not. He likes humble-minded little girls. Now don't interrupt me any more."

"There's the gong, I'm off," cried Sibyl. She kissed her hand to Miss Winstead, her face all alight with happiness.

"I know I am pretty, she always talks like that when I am," thought the child, who had a very keen insight into character. "Mother will kiss me to-night, I am so glad. I wonder if Jesus Christ thinks me pretty too."

Sibyl Ogilvie, aged eight, had a theology of her own. It was extremely simple, and had no perplexing elements about it. There were three persons who were absolutely perfect. Jesus Christ Who lived in heaven, but Who saw everything that took place on earth, and her own father and mother. No one else was absolutely without sin, but these three were. It was a most comfortable doctrine, and it sustained her little heart through some perplexing passages in her small life. She used to shut her eyes when her mother frowned, and say softly under her breath—

"It's not wrong, 'cos it's mother. Mother couldn't do nothing wrong, no more than Jesus could;" and she used to stop her ears when her mother's voice, sharp and passionate, rang across the room. Something was trying mother dreadfully, but mother had a right to be angry; she was not sinful, like nurse, when she got into her tantrums. As to father, he was never cross. He did look tired and disturbed sometimes. It must be because he was sorry for the rest of the world. Yes, father and mother were perfection. It was a great support to know this. It was a very great honour to have been born their little girl. Every morning when Sibyl knelt to pray, and every evening when she offered up her nightly petitions, she thanked God most earnestly for having given her as parents those two perfect people known to the world as Philip Ogilvie and his wife.

"It was so awfully kind of you, Jesus," Sibyl would say; "and I must try to grow up as nearly good as I can, because of You and father and mother. I must try not to be cross, and I must try not to be vain, and I must try to love my lessons. I don't think I am really vain, Jesus. It is just because my mother likes me best when I am pretty that I want to be pretty. It's for no other reason, really and truly; but I don't like lessons, particularly spelling lessons. I cannot pretend I do. Can I?"

Jesus never made any audible response to the child's query, but she often felt a little tug at her heart which caused her to fly to her spelling-book and learn one or two difficult words with frantic zeal.

As she ran downstairs now, she reflected over the problem of her mother's kisses being softest and her mother's eyes kindest when her own eyes were bright and her little figure radiant; and she also thought of the other problem, of her grave-eyed father always loving her, no matter whether her frock was torn, her hair untidy, or her little face smudged.

Because of her cherubic face, Sibyl had been called the Angel when quite a baby, and somehow the name stuck to her, particularly on the lips of her father. It is true she had a sparkling face and soft features and blue eyes; but she was, when all is said and done, a somewhat worldly little angel, and had, both in the opinions of Miss Winstead and nurse, as many faults as could well be packed into the breast of one small child. Both admitted that Sibyl had a very loving heart; but she was fearless, headstrong, at times even defiant, and was very naughty and idle over her lessons.

Miss Winstead was fond of taking complaints of Sibyl to Mrs. Ogilvie, and she was fond, also, of hoping against hope that these complaints would lead to satisfactory results; but, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Ogilvie never troubled herself about them. She was the sort of woman who took the lives of others with absolute unconcern; her own life absorbed every thought and every feeling. Anything that added to her own comfort was esteemed; anything that worried her was shut as much as possible out of sight. She was fond of Sibyl in her careless way. There were moments when she was proud of the pretty and attractive child, but she had not the slightest idea of attempting to mould her character, nor of becoming her instructress. One of Mrs. Ogilvie's favourite theories was that mothers should not educate their children.

"The child should go to the mother for love and petting," she would say. "Miss Winstead may complain of the darling as much as she pleases, but need not suppose that I shall scold her."

It was Sibyl's father after all who now and then spoke to her about her unworthy conduct.

"You are called the Angel, and you must try to act up to your name," he said on one of these occasions, fixing his own dark-grey eyes on the little girl.

"Oh yes, father," answered the Angel, "but, you see, I wasn't born that way, same as you was. It seems a pity, doesn't it? You're perfect and I am not. I can't help the way I was born, can I, father?"

"No; no one is perfect, darling," replied the father.

"You are," answered the Angel, and she gave her head a defiant toss. "You and my mother and my beautiful Lord Jesus up in heaven. But I'll try to please you, father, so don't knit up your forehead."

Sibyl as she spoke laid her soft hand on her father's brow and tried to smooth out some wrinkles.

"Same as if you was an old man," she said; "but you're perfect, perfect, and I love you, I love you," and she encircled his neck with her soft arms and pressed many kisses on his face.

On these occasions Philip Ogilvie felt uncomfortable, for he was a man with many passions and beset with infirmities, and at the time when Sibyl praised him most, when she uttered her charming confident words, and raised her eyes full of absolute faith to his, he was thinking with a strange acute pain at his heart of a transaction which he might undertake and of a temptation which he knew well was soon to be presented to him.

"I should not like the child to know about it," was his reflection; "but all the same, if I do it, if I fall, it will be for her sake, for hers alone."

CHAPTER II.

Sibyl skipped down to the drawing-room with her spirits brimful of happiness. She opened the door wide and danced in.

"Here I come," she cried, "here I come, buttercups and daisies and violets and me." She looked from one parent to the other, held out her flowing short skirts with each dimpled hand, and danced across the room.

Mrs. Ogilvie had tears in her eyes; she had just come to the sentimental part of her quarrel. At sight of the child she rose hastily, and walked to the window. Philip Ogilvie went down the room, put both his hands round Sibyl's waist, and lifted her to a level with his shoulders.

"What a fairy-like little girl this is!" he cried. "You are Spring come to cheer us up."

"I am glad," whispered Sibyl; "but let me down, please, father, I want to kiss mother."

Mr. Ogilvie dropped her to the ground. She ran up to her mother.

"Father says I am Spring, look at me," she said, and she gazed into the beautiful, somewhat sullen face of her parent.

Mrs. Ogilvie had hoped that Sibyl would not notice her tears, but Sibyl, gentle as she looked, had the eyes of a hawk.

"Something is fretting my ownest mother," she whispered under her breath, and then she took her mother's soft hand and covered it with kisses. After kissing it, she patted it, and then she returned to her father's side.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Ogilvie knew why, but as soon as Sibyl entered the room it seemed ridiculous for them to quarrel. Mrs. Ogilvie turned with an effort, said something kind to her husband, he responded courteously, then the dinner gong sounded, and the three entered the dining-room.

It was one of the customs of the house that Sibyl, when they dined alone, should always sit with her parents during this hour. Mrs. Ogilvie objected to the plan, urging that it was very bad for the child. But Ogilvie thought otherwise, and notwithstanding all the mother's objections the point was carried. A high chair was placed for Sibyl next her father, and she occupied it evening after evening, nibbling a biscuit from the dessert, and airing her views in a complacent way on every possible subject under the sun.

"I call Miss Winstead crosspatch now," she said on this occasion. "She is more cranky than you think. She is, really, truly, father."

"You must not talk against your governess, Sibyl," said her mother from the other end of the table.

"Oh, let her speak out to us, my dear," said the father. "What was Miss Winstead cross about to-day, Sibyl?"

"Spelling, as usual," said Sibyl briefly, "but more special 'cos Lord Jesus made me pretty."

"Hush!" said the mother again.

Sibyl glanced at her father. There was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes which he could scarcely keep back.

"My dear," he said, addressing his wife, "do you think Miss Winstead is just the person—"

"I beg of you, Philip," interrupted the mother, "not to speak of the child's teacher before her face. Sibyl, I forbid you to make unkind remarks."

"It's 'cos they're both so perfect," thought Sibyl, "but it's hard on me not to be able to 'splain things. If I can't, what is to be done?"

She munched her biscuit sorrowfully, and looked with steadfast eyes across the room. She supposed she would have to endure Miss Winstead, crosspatch as she was, and she did not enjoy the task which mother and Lord Jesus had set her.

The footman was in the act of helping Mr. Ogilvie to champagne, and Sibyl paused in her thoughts to watch the frothy wine as it filled the glass.

"Is it nice?" she inquired.

"Very nice, Sibyl. Would you like to taste it?"

"No, thank you, father. Nurse says if you drink wine when you're a little girl, you grow up to be drunk as a hog."

"My dear Sibyl!" cried the mother, "I really must speak to nurse. What a disgraceful thing to say!"

"Let us turn the subject," said the father.

Sibyl turned it with a will.

"I 'spect I ought to 'fess to you," she said. "I was cross myself to-day. Seems to me I'm not getting a bit perfect. I stamped my foot when Miss Winstead made me write all my spelling over again. Father, is it necessary for a little girl to spell long words?"

"You would not like to put wrong spelling into your letters to me, would you?" was the answer.

"I don't think I'd much care," said Sibyl, with a smile. "You'd know what I meant, wouldn't you, whether I spelt the words right or not? All the same," she added, "I'll spell right if you wish it—I mean, I'll try."

"That's a good girl. Now tell me what else you did naughty?"

"When Sibyl talks about her sins, would it not be best for her to do so in private?" said the mother again.

"But this is private," said Mr. Ogilvie, "only her father and mother."

Mrs. Ogilvie glanced at a footman who stood not far off, and who was in vain endeavouring to suppress a smile.

"I washed my doll's clothes, although nurse told me not," continued Sibyl, "and I made a mess in the night nursery. I spilt the water and wetted my pinny, and I *would* open the window, although it was raining. I ran downstairs, too, and asked Watson to give me a macaroon biscuit. He wasn't to blame—Watson wasn't."

The unfortunate footman whose name was now introduced hastily turned his back, but his ears looked very red as he arranged some glasses on the sideboard.

"Father," whispered Sibyl, "do you know that Watson has got a sweetheart, and—"

"Hush! hush!" said Mr. Ogilvie, "go on with your confessions."

"They're rather sad, aren't they, father? Now I come to think of it, they are very, very sad. I didn't do one right thing to-day 'cept to make myself pretty. Miss Winstead was so angry, and so was nurse, but when I am with them I don't mind a bit being naughty. I wouldn't be a flabby good girl for all the world."

"Oh! Angel, what is to become of you?" said her father.

Sibyl looked full at him, her eyes sparkled, then a curious change came into them. He was good—perfect; it was lovely to think of it, but she felt sure that she could never be perfect like that. All the same, she did not want to pain him. She slipped her small hand into his, and presently she whispered:

"I'll do anything in all the world to please you and mother and Lord Jesus."

"That is right," said the father, who gave a swift thought at the moment to the temptation which he knew was already on its way, and which he would never yield to but for the sake of the child.

The rest of the dinner proceeded without many more remarks, and immediately afterwards Sibyl kissed both her parents and went upstairs.

"Good-night, little Spring," said her father, and there was a note of pain in his voice.

She gave him an earnest hug, and then she whispered—

"Is it 'cos I'm a wicked girl you're sad?"

"No," he answered, "you are not wicked, my darling; you are the best, the sweetest in all the world."

"Oh, no, father," answered Sibyl, "that is not true. I am not the best nor the sweetest, and I wouldn't like to be too good, 'cept for you. Good-night, darling father."

Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie returned to the drawing-room.

"You spoil that child," said the wife, "but it is on a par with everything else you do. You have no perception of what is right. I don't pretend to be a good mother, but I don't talk nonsense to Sibyl. She ought not to speak about nurse and her governess before servants, and it is disgraceful of her to drag the footman and his concerns into the conversation at dinner. She ought not, also, to boast about doing naughty things."

"I wish you would leave the child alone," said Ogilvie in an annoyed voice; "she is good enough for me, little pet, and I would not have her altered for the world. But now, Mildred, to return to our cause of dissension before dinner, we must get this matter arranged. What do you mean to do about your invitation to Grayleigh Manor?"

"I have given you my views on that subject, Philip; I am going."

"I would much rather you did not."

"I am sorry." Mrs. Ogilvie shrugged her shoulders. "I am willing to please you in all reasonable matters; this is unreasonable, therefore I shall take my own way."

"It is impossible for me to accompany you."

"I can live without you for a few days, and I shall take the child."

"Sibyl! No, I do not wish it."

"I fear you must put up with it. I have written to say that Sibyl and I will go down on Saturday."

Ogilvie, who had been seated, now rose, and went to the window. He looked out with a dreary expression on his face.

"You know as well as I do the reasons why it would be best for you not to go to Grayleigh Manor at present," he said. "You can easily write to give an excuse. Remember, we were both asked, and the fact that I cannot leave town is sufficient reason for you to decline."

"I am going," said Mrs. Ogilvie. Her eyes, which were large and dark, flashed with defiance. Ogilvie looked at her with a frown between his brows.

"Is that your last word?" he inquired.

"It is, I go on Saturday. If you were not so disagreeable and disobliging you could easily come with me, but you never do anything to please me."

"Nor you to please me, Mildred," he was about to say, but he restrained himself. After a pause he said gently, "There is one thing that makes the situation almost unbearable."

"And what is that?" she asked.

"The attitude of little Sibyl towards us both. She thinks us—Mildred, she thinks us perfect. What will happen to the child when her eyes are opened?"

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," was Mrs. Ogilvie's flippant remark. "But that attitude is much encouraged by you. You make her morbid and sensitive."

"Morbid! Sibyl morbid! There never was a more open-hearted, frank, healthy creature. Did you not hear her say at dinner that she would not be a flabby good girl for anything? Now, I must tell you that perhaps wrong as that speech was, it rejoiced my heart."

"And it sickened me," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "You do everything in your power to make her eccentric. Now, I don't wish to have an eccentric daughter. I wish to have a well brought up girl, who will be good while she is young, speak properly, not make herself in any way remarkable, learn her lessons, and make a successful *début* in Society, all in due course."

"With a view, doubtless, to a brilliant marriage," added the husband, bitterly.

"I am going to knock all this nonsense out of Sibyl," was his wife's answer, "and I mean to begin it when we get to Grayleigh Manor."

Mrs. Ogilvie had hardly finished her words before an angry bang at the drawing-room door told her that her husband had left her.

Ogilvie went to his smoking-room at the other end of the hall. There he paced restlessly up and down. His temples were beating, and the pain at his heart was growing worse.

The postman's ring was heard, and the footman, Watson, entered with a letter.

Ogilvie had expected this letter, and he knew what its purport would be. He only glanced at the writing, threw it on the table near, and resumed his walk up and down.

"It is the child," he thought. "She perplexes me and she tempts me. Never was there a sweeter decoy duck to the verge of ruin. Poor little innocent white Angel! Her attitude towards her mother and me is sometimes almost maddening. Mildred wants to take that little innocent life and mould it after her own fashion. But, after all, am I any better than Mildred? If I yield to this"—he touched the letter with his hand—"I shall sweep in gold, and all money anxieties will be laid to rest. Little Sib will be rich by-and-by. This is a big thing, and if I do it I shall see my way to clearing off those debts which Mildred's extravagance, and doubtless my own inclination, have caused me to accumulate. Whatever happens Sibyl will be all right; and yet—I don't care for wealth, but Mildred does, and the child will be better for money. Money presents a shield between a sensitive heart like Sibyl's, and the world. Yes, I am tempted. Sibyl tempts me."

He thrust the letter into a drawer, locked the drawer, put the key in his pocket, and ran up to Sibyl's nursery. She was asleep, and there was no one else in the room. The blinds were down at the windows, and the nursery, pretty, dainty, sweet, and fresh, was in shadow.

Ogilvie stepped softly across the room, and drew up the blind. The moonlight now came in, and shed a silver bar of light across the child's bed. Sibyl lay with her golden hair half covering the pillow, her hands and arms flung outside the bedclothes.

"Good-night, little darling," said her father. He bent over her, and pressed a light kiss upon her cheek. Feather touch as it was, it aroused the child. She opened her big blue eyes.

"Oh, father, is that you?" she cried in a voice of rapture.

"Yes, it is I. I came to wish you good-night."

"You are good, you never forget," said Sibyl. She clasped her arms round his neck. "I went to bed without saying my prayers. May I say them now to you?"

"Not for worlds," it was the man's first impulse to remark, but he checked himself. "Of course, dear," he said.

Sibyl raised herself to a kneeling posture. She clasped her soft arms around her father's neck.

"Pray God forgive me for being naughty to-day," she began, "and pray God make me better to-morrow, 'cos it will please my darlingest father and my darling mother; and I thank you, God, so much for making them good, very good, and without sin. Pray God forgive Sibyl, and try to make her better."

"Now, father, you're pleased," continued the little girl. "It was very hard to say that, because really, truly, I don't want to be better, but I'll try hard if it pleases you."

"Yes, Sibyl, try hard," said her father, "try very hard to be good. Don't let goodness go. Grasp it tight with both hands and never let it go. So may God indeed help you." Ogilvie said these words in a strained voice. Then he covered her up in bed, drew down the blinds, and left her.

"He's fretted; it's just 'cos the world is so wicked, and 'cos I'm not as good as I ought to be," thought the child. A moment later she had fallen asleep with a smile on her face.

Ogilvie went to his club. There he wrote a short letter. It ran as follows:—

"My Dear Grayleigh,—

"Your offer was not unexpected. I thought it over even before it came, and I have considered it since. Although I am fully aware of the money advantages it holds out to me I have decided to decline it. Frankly I cannot undertake to assay the Lombard Deeps Gold Mine, although your offer has been a great temptation. No doubt you will find another man more suited for your purpose.

"Yours sincerely,
"Philip Ogilvie."

It was between one and two that same night that Ogilvie let himself in with his latchkey.

His wife had been to one or two receptions, and had not yet gone to bed. She was standing in the hall, looking radiant as he had seldom seen her. She was dressed beautifully, and her hair and neck were covered with diamonds.

"What," he cried, "up still, Mildred? You ought to be in bed."

He did not give her any glance of admiration, beautiful as she appeared. He shivered slightly with a movement which she did not notice as she stood before him, the lamplight falling all over her lovely dress and figure.

"I am so glad you have come back, Phil," she said. "I shall sleep better now that I have seen you. I hear that Lord Grayleigh has offered you the post of engineer on the board of the Lombard Deeps Mine Company."

Ogilvie did not answer. After a moment's pause he said in a sullen tone—

"Had you not better go to bed? It is much too late for you to be up."

"What does that matter? I am far too excited to sleep, and it is wrong of you to keep things of moment from your wife. This offer means a large addition to our income. Why, Phil, Phil, we can buy a country place now; we can do, oh! so many things. We can pay those terrible debts that worry you. What is the matter? Aren't you pleased? Why do you frown at me? And you are pale, are you ill?"

"Come into my smoking-room," he said, gravely. He took her hand and, drawing her in, switched on the electric light. Then he turned his wife round and looked full at her.

"This will make a great difference in our position," she said. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks were flushed, her pearly teeth showed between her parted lips.

"What do you mean by our position?" he said.

"You know perfectly well that we have not money enough to keep up this house; it is a struggle from first to last."

"And yet I earn close on six thousand a year, Mildred. Have you never considered that you are the person who makes it a struggle?"

"It is impossible; impossible to manage," she said, petulantly.

"It is, when you buy all these worthless baubles"—he touched her diamonds, and then he started away from her. "Why you should saddle yourself and me with debts almost impossible to meet for the sake of these is beyond my comprehension; but if you really do want a fresh toy in the way of an ornament to-morrow you have but to order it—that is, in moderation."

"Ah! I knew you had accepted," she said, making a quick dancing movement with her small feet. "Now I am happy; we can have a place if possible on the river. I have always longed to live close to the Thames. It is most unfashionable not to have a country seat, and the child will be well off by-and-by. I was told to-night by a City man who is to be one of the directors of the new company, that if you are clever you can make a cool forty thousand pounds out of this business. He says your name is essential to float the thing with the public."

"You know, perhaps, what all this means?" said Ogilvie, after a pause.

"Why do you speak in that tone, quite with the Sibyl air?"

"Don't dare to mention the child's name at a moment like this. I just wish to tell you, Mildred, in a few words, what it would mean to the world at large if I assayed the Lombard Deeps Gold Mine."

"Oh, your business terms do so puzzle me," she answered; "I declare I am getting sleepy." Mrs. Ogilvie yawned slightly.

"It would be better if you went to bed, but as you are here I shall put your mind at rest. If I accepted Grayleigh's offer—"

"If! But you have done so, of course you have."

"If I do, my name as engineer to the company will cause many people to buy shares. Now, Mildred, I am not sure of the Lombard Deeps Gold Mine. I know more about this business than I can explain to you, and you have a tongue, and women cannot keep secrets."

"As usual, you taunt me," she said, "but what does that matter? I could bear even an insult from you to-night, I am so excited and so pleased. I believe in the Lombard Deeps Gold

Mine. I intend to put all the money I can lay hold of into it. Of course you will assay the Lombard Deeps? I never could make out what assaying meant, but it seems to be a way of raking in gold, and I was told to-night by Mr. Halkett that you are the most trusted assayer in the whole of London. Has the letter come yet? Has Lord Grayleigh yet offered you the post?"

"The letter has come."

"You would make thousands a year out of it. Phil, oh, Phil, how happy I am! You have replied, have you not?"

"I have."

"Then why do you keep me in suspense? It is settled. What are you so glum about?"

"I have declined the offer. I cannot assay the Lombard Deeps Gold Mine."

"Philip!" His wife's voice was at first incredulous, then it rose into a scream.

"You cannot be speaking the truth," she said.

"My answer is posted. I am not too scrupulous about small things, but I draw the line at a matter of that sort. Go to bed."

She did not speak for a moment, her face turned pale, then she went up close to him.

"I hate you," she said; "go your own way in the future," and she left him standing silent.

CHAPTER III.

Sibyl and her mother went to Grayleigh Manor on the following Saturday. Sibyl was wild with excitement. Nurse was going, of course, to look after her, but Miss Winstead was to remain at home. Sibyl felt that she could manage nurse, but there were moments when Miss Winstead was a little obstinate. She would have a delightful time now in the country with her perfect mother. Of course, there was the pain of parting with father, who was just as perfect, if not a little more so. In her heart of hearts Sibyl felt that she understood her father, and that there were times when she did not quite understand her mother; but, never mind, her mother was the perfection of all feminine beauty and loveliness, and grace and goodness, and her father was the perfection of all masculine goodness and nobility of character. Sibyl in her heart of hearts wished that she had been born a boy.

" I am much more like a boy than a girl," she thought, " and that is why I understand father so well. But it will be lovely going to the country with mother, my ownest mother. I expect

I'll have great fun; and, as mother doesn't care so very much whether I am perfect or not, perhaps I can be a little naughty on my own account. That will be lovely. I can't be really naughty with father, it is impossible; father is so very tall up, and has such grand thoughts about things; but I can with mother."

So Sibyl watched the packing of her dainty frocks and gay sashes and pretty ribbons, and then ran down to the smoking-room to kiss and hug her father.

Ogilvie was very grave and silent, and did not say a word, nor draw her out in any way, and her mother was out most of the time either paying calls or shopping, and at last the day dawned when they were to go away. Ogilvie had kissed Sibyl with great passion the night before.

"Don't forget me while you are away, little woman," he said, "and look after mother, won't you?"

"She won't need me to look after her, she's quite, quite perfect," said Sibyl; "but I'm going to watch her, and try to copy her."

"Child, don't do that," said the man.

"Not copy my ownest mother? What do you mean, father?"

"Well, well, darling, God will look after you, I do believe. You are not far from Him, are you, Sib? You know we call you the Angel.

Angels are supposed to have their home in heaven."

"Well, my home is right down here on earth," said Sibyl in a very contented tone. "I'll have a real jolly time away, I 'spect."

"I hope there will be some nice little boys and girls there with whom you can play; and go to bed early, Sib, just for father's sake, and don't forget to pray for me."

"I will, I will," said the child; "I always thank God for you because he made you so beautiful and good."

"Well, I am busy now; go to bed, little woman."

That was the last Sibyl saw of her father before she went away, for he did not go to see his wife and daughter off, and Mrs. Ogilvie looked decidedly cross as they stepped into the train. But they soon found themselves at Grayleigh Manor.

Sibyl and her nurse were hurried off to the nursery regions, very much to the little girl's secret indignation, and Mrs. Ogilvie seemed to be swept into a crowd of people who all surrounded her and talked eagerly and laughed noisily. Sibyl gave them a keen glance out of those very blue eyes, and in her heart of hearts thought they were a poor lot.

She and nurse had two nice rooms set apart for their own special use, a sitting-room and a sleeping-room, and nurse proceeded to unpack the little girl's things, and then to dress her in one of her prettiest frocks.

" You are to go to tea in the school-room," she said. " There are two or three other children there, and I hope you will be very good, Miss Sibyl, and not spoil this beautiful frock."

It was a white cashmere frock, very much embroidered and surrounded by little frills and soft laces, and, while absolutely simple and quite suited to the little girl, was really a wonder of expense and art.

" It's a beautiful dress," she said; " you are wearing money now."

" Money," said Sibyl, " what do you mean ? "

" This frock is money; you look very nice in it. Be sure, now, you don't spot it. It would be wicked, just as if you were throwing sovereigns into the fire."

" I don't understand," said Sibyl; " I wish it wasn't a grand frock. Did you bring any of my common, common frocks, nursie ? "

" I should think not, indeed. Your fine lady mother would be angry if she saw you looking a show."

" If you speak again in that tone of my mother I'll slap you," said Sibyl.

" Highty-tighty ! " said the nurse; " your spirit is almost past bearing. You need to be broke in."

"And so do you," answered Sibyl. "If mother is good you are not, and I'm not, so we both must be broke in; but I've got a bit of a temper. I know that. Nursie, when you were a little girl did you have a bit of a temper of your own?"

"That I did. I was a handful, my mother used to say."

"Then we *has* something in common," said Sibyl, her eyes sparkling. "I'm a handful, too. I'm off to the school-room."

"There never was such a child," thought the woman as Sibyl dashed away, banging the door after her; "she's not shy, and she's as sweet as sweet can be, and yet she's a handful of spirit, of uppishness and contrariness. Well, God bless her, whatever she is. How did that heartless mother come by her? I can understand her being the master's child, but her mother's! Dear me, I'm often sorry when I think how mistook the poor little thing is in that woman she thinks so perfect."

Sibyl, quite happy, her heart beating high with excitement, poked her radiant little face round the school-room door. There were three children already in the room—Mabel, Gus, and Freda St. Claire. They were Lord Grayleigh's children, and were handsome, and well cared for, and now looked with curiosity at Sibyl.

"Oh, you're the little girl," said Mabel, who was twelve years of age. She raised her voice in a languid tone.

"Yes, I *are* the little girl," said Sibyl. She came forward with bold, confident steps, and looked at the tea-table.

"Where's my place?" she said. "Is it laid for me? I am the visitor."

Gus, aged ten, who had been somewhat inclined to sulk when Sibyl appeared, now smiled, and pulled out a chair.

"Sit down," he said; "you had better sit there, near Mabel; she's pouring out tea. She's the boss, you know."

"What's a boss?" said Sibyl.

"You must be a silly not to know what a boss is."

"I aren't no more silly than you are," said Sibyl. "May I have some bread and butter and jam? I'll ask you some things about town, and perhaps you can't answer me. What's a—what's a—oh, I'll think of something real slangy presently; but please don't talk to me too much while I'm eating, or I'll spill jam on my money frock."

"You are a very queer little girl," said Mabel; but she looked at her now with favour. A child who could talk like Sibyl was likely to be an acquisition.

"What a silly you are," said Gus. "What did you put on that thing for? We don't want frilled and laced-up frocks, we want frocks that girls can wear to climb trees in, and—"

"Climb trees! Oh," cried Sibyl, "are you that sort? then I'm your girl. Oh, I am glad! My ownest father would be pleased. He likes me to be brave. I'm a hoyden—do you know what a hoyden is? If you want to have a few big larks while I am here, see to 'em quick, for I'm your girl."

Gus burst into a roar of laughter, and Mabel smiled.

"You are very queer," she said. "I don't know whether our governess will like our being with you. You seem to use strange words. We never get into scrapes—we are quite ladylike and good, but we don't wear grand frocks either. Can't you take that thing off?"

"I wish I could; I hate it myself."

"Well, ask your servant to change it."

"But my nurse hasn't brought a single shabby frock with me."

"Are all your frocks as grand as that?"

"Some of 'em grander."

"We might lend her one of our own brown holland frocks," said Freda.

"Oh, do!" said Sibyl; "that will be lovely."

"We are going to do some climbing this afternoon, so you may as well put it on," continued Freda.

Sibyl clapped her hands with delight. "It's a great comfort coming down to this place," she said finally, "'cos I can give way a little; but with my father and mother I have to keep myself in."

"Why?"

"It's mostly on account of my most perfect of fathers."

"But isn't Philip Ogilvie your father?" said Gus.

"Mr. Ogilvie," corrected Sibyl, in a very proud tone.

"Oh, fudge! I heard father call him Philip Ogilvie. He's not perfect."

Sibyl's face turned white; she looked full at Gus. Gus, not observing the expression in her eyes, continued, in a glib and easy tone:

"Father didn't know I was there; he was talking to another man. I think the man's name was Halkett. I'm always great at remembering names, and I heard him say 'Philip Ogilvie will do what we want. When it comes to the point he's not too scrupulous.' Yes, scrupulous was the word, and I ran away and looked it out in the dictionary, and it means—oh, you needn't stare at me as if your eyes were starting out of your head. It means a person who hesitates from fear of acting wrongly. Now, as your father isn't scrupulous, that means that he doesn't hesitate to act wrong."

Sibyl with one swift, unerring bang struck Gus a sharp blow across the cheek.

"What have you done that for, you little beggar?" he said, his eyes flashing fire.

"To teach you not to tell lies," answered Sibyl. She turned, went up the room, and stood by the window. Her heart was bursting, and tears were scorching her eyeballs. "But I won't shed them," thought the child, "not for worlds."

Sibyl's action was so unexpected that there was a silence in the room for a few moments, but presently Freda stole softly to Sibyl's side and touched her on her arm.

"Gus is sorry he said anything to hurt you," she said; "we didn't understand that you would feel it as you do, but we are all sorry, and we like you all the better for it. Won't you shake hands with Gus and be friends?"

"And I'll never say a word against your father again," said Gus.

"You had better not," answered Sibyl. "No, I won't shake hands; I won't make friends with you till I know something more about you. But I'd like to climb trees, and to get into a holland frock."

CHAPTER IV.

It was great fun getting into the holland frock, more particularly when it was discovered to be too short, and also very dirty. It had a great ink-stain in front, and the sleeves were tight and showed a good bit of Sibyl's white arms. She looked at herself in the glass and danced about in her excitement.

"You can have this old sailor hat to match the frock," said Freda in conclusion. "Now no one will say you are too fine. Come out now, Gus and the others are waiting."

Yes, the sun shone once more for Sibyl, and she forgot for a time Gus's cruel words about her father. He was most attentive to her now, and initiated her into the mystery of climbing. Screams of laughter followed her valiant efforts to ascend the leafy heights of certain beech trees which grew not far from the house. This laughter attracted the attention of a lady and gentleman who were pacing the leafy alley not far away.

"What a noise those children make," said Lord Grayleigh to his companion.

"How many children have you, Lord Grayleigh?" asked Mrs. Ogilvie. She looked full at him as she spoke.

"I have three," he replied; "they are great scamps, and never for a single moment fit to be seen. Since their mother died"—he sighed as he uttered these words, he was a widower of over two years' standing—"I have kept them more or less with myself. There is no harm in them, although they are pickles. Come, I will introduce you to them. That reminds me, I have not yet seen your own little daughter."

Mrs. Ogilvie was very proud of Sibyl, but only when she looked her best. The mother now contemplated, with a feeling of satisfaction, the nice dresses which she had secured for the child before she came into the country. No one could look more lovely than this little daughter of hers, when dressed suitably, so abundant was her golden brown hair, and so blue were her eyes, so straight the little features, so soft the curves of the rosy lips. It is true those blue eyes had an expression in them which never in this world could Mrs. Ogilvie understand, nevertheless, the child's beauty was apparent to the most superficial observer; and Mrs. Ogilvie turned and accompanied Lord Grayleigh in the direction of the merry sounds willingly enough.

"I see four little figures dancing about among those trees," said Lord Grayleigh. "We will see them all together."

They turned down a side walk, and came face to face with Sibyl herself. Now, at that instant the little girl certainly did not look at her best. The holland frock, short and shabby, had a great rent above the knee, her soft cheek was scratched and bleeding slightly, and there was a smudge across her forehead.

Sibyl, quite unconscious of these defects, flew to her mother's side.

"Oh, Mummy," she cried, "I'm so happy. Gus has been teaching me to climb. Do you see that beech tree? I climbed as far as the second branch, and Gus said I did it splendid. It's lovely to sit up there."

Sibyl did not even notice Lord Grayleigh, who stood and watched this little scene with an amused face. Mrs. Ogilvie was by no means pleased.

"What do you mean, Sibyl," she said, "by wearing that disgraceful frock? Why did nurse put it into your trunk? And you know I do not wish you to climb trees. You are an extremely naughty girl. No, Lord Grayleigh, I will not introduce my little daughter to you now. When you are properly dressed, Sibyl, and know how to behave yourself, you shall have the honour of shaking hands with Lord Grayleigh. Go into the house, now, I am ashamed of you."

Sibyl turned first red and then white.

"Is that Lord Grayleigh?" she whispered.

"Yes, my dear, but I shall not answer any of your other questions at present. I am extremely displeased with you."

"I am sorry you are angry, mother; but may I—may I say one thing, just one, afore I go?"

Mrs. Ogilvie was about to hustle the child off, when Lord Grayleigh interfered. "Do let her speak," he said; "she looks a most charming little maid. For my part I like children best in *déshabille*. What is it, little woman?"

"It's that I don't want to shake hands with you—never, *never!*" answered Sibyl, and she turned her back on the astonished nobleman, and marched off in the direction of the house.

Mrs. Ogilvie turned to apologise.

"I am terribly ashamed of Sibyl, she is the most extraordinary child," she said. "What can have possessed her to put on that frock, and why did she speak to you in that strange, rude way?" Here Mrs. Ogilvie uttered a sigh. "I fear it is her father's doing," she continued, "he makes her most eccentric. I do hope you will overlook her naughty words. The moment I go into the house I shall speak to her, and also to nurse for allowing her to wear that disgraceful frock."

"I don't think your nurse is to blame," said

Lord Grayleigh. "I have a keen eye for dress, and have a memory of that special frock. It happens to possess a green stain in the back which I am not likely to forget. I think my Freda wore it a good deal last summer, and I remember the occasion when the green stain was indelibly fixed upon it. You must know, Mrs. Ogilvie, that my three children are imps, and it was the impiest of the imps' frocks your little girl happened to be wearing. But what a handsome little creature she is! A splendid face. How I have come to fall under her displeasure, however, is a mystery to me."

"Oh, you can never account for Sibyl's whims," said Mrs. Ogilvie; "it is all her father's fault. It is a great trial to me, I assure you."

"I should be very proud of that child if I were you," answered Lord Grayleigh. "She has a particularly frank, fine face."

"Oh, she is handsome enough," answered Mrs. Ogilvie. "But what she will grow up to, heaven only knows. She has the strangest ideas on all sorts of subjects. She absolutely believes that her father and I are perfect—could you credit it? At the same time she is a very naughty child herself. I will go into the house, now, and give her a talking to."

"Don't scold her, poor little thing," said Lord Grayleigh. He was a kind-hearted man in the main. "For my part," he continued, "I like naughty children; I must force her confidence presently. She has quite roused my curiosity. But now, Mrs. Ogilvie, to turn to other matters, what can we do to persuade your husband to alter his mind? You know, of course, that I have asked him to assay the Lombard Deeps Mine?"

"I do know it," answered Mrs. Ogilvie, the colour flushing into her face. "Philip is too extraordinary at times. For my part, I really do not know how to thank you; please believe that I am altogether on your side. If only we could persuade that eccentric husband of mine to change his mind."

"He is a strange fellow," answered Lord Grayleigh slowly; "but, do you know, I think all the more of him for a letter I received a few days ago. At the same time, it will be prejudicial to our interests if he should not act as engineer in this new undertaking. He is the one man the public absolutely trusts, and of course—"

"Why do you think more of him for refusing an advantageous offer?"

"I don't know that I can explain. Money is not everything—at least, to some people. Shall we go into the house? I need not say that I am glad you are on our side, and doubtless your husband's scruples"—Lord Grayleigh laid the slightest emphasis on the word, and made it, even to the obtuse ears of his hearer, sound offensive—"even your husband's scruples of conscience may be overcome by judicious management. A wife can do much on occasions of this sort, and also a friend. He and I are more than acquaintances—we are friends. I have a hearty liking for Ogilvie. It is a disappointment not to have him here, but I hope to have the pleasure of lunching with him on Monday. Trust me to do what I can to further your interests and his own on that occasion. Now shall we go into the house? You will like to rest before dinner."

Mrs. Ogilvie often liked to affect weariness. It suited her peculiar style of beauty to look languid. She went slowly to her room. Her maid, Hortense, helped her to take off her travelling dress, and to put on a teagown before she lay down on the sofa. She then told the girl to leave her.

When alone Mrs. Ogilvie thought rapidly and deeply. What was the matter with Philip? What did Lord Grayleigh mean by talking of scruples? But she was not going to worry her head on that subject. Philip must not be quixotic, he must accept the good things the gods sent him. Additional wealth would add so immensely to their happiness.

"Money *is* everything," she thought, "whatever Lord Grayleigh may say. Those who refuse it are fools, and worse. Lord Grayleigh and I must bring Philip to his senses."

She moved restlessly on her sofa, and looked across the comfortable room.

With a little more wealth she could hold her own with her friends and acquaintances, and present a good figure in that world of society which was her one idea of heaven. Above all things, debts, which came between her and perfect bliss, could be cleared off. Her creditors would not wait for payment much longer, but if Philip assayed the new mine, he would be handsomely paid for his pains, and all her own cares would take to themselves wings and fly away. Why did he hesitate? How tiresome he was! Surely his life had not been so immaculate up to the present that he should hesitate thus when the golden opportunity to secure a vast fortune arrived.

Ogilvie came of one of the best old families across the border, and had a modest competence of his own handed down to him from a long line of honourable ancestors. He had also inherited a certain code which he could not easily forget. He called it a code of honour, and Mrs. Ogilvie, alas! did not understand it. She reflected over the situation now, and grew restless. If Philip was really such a goose as to refuse his present chance, she would never forgive him. She would bring up to him continually the golden opportunity he had let slip, and weary his very soul. She was the sort of soft, pretty woman who could nag a man to the verge of distraction. She knew that inestimable art to perfection. She felt, as she lay on the sofa and toyed with the ribbons of her pretty and expensive tea-gown, that she had her weapons ready to hand. Then, with an irritated flash, she thought of the child. Of course the child was nice, handsome, and her own; Sibyl was very lucky to have at least one parent who would not spoil her. But was she not being spoiled? Were there not some things intolerable about her?

"May I come in, Mumsy, or are you too tired?" There was something in the quality of the voice at the door which caused Mrs. Ogilvie's callous heart to beat quicker for a moment, then she said in an irritated tone—

"Oh, come in, of course; I want to speak to you."

Sibyl entered. Nurse had changed her holland frock, and dressed the little girl in pale pink silk. The dress was very unsuitable, but it became the radiant little face and bright large eyes, and pathetic, sweet mouth, to perfection.

Sibyl ran up to her mother, and, dropping on one knee by her side, looked up into her face.

"Now you'll kiss me," she said; "now you're pleased with your own Sibyl. I am pretty, I'm beautiful, and you, darling, darling mother, will kiss me."

"Get up, Sib, and don't be absurd," said Mrs. Ogilvie; but as she spoke a warm light came into her eyes, for the child was fascinating, and just in the mood to appeal most to her mother.

"Really," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "you do look nice in that dress, it fits you very well. Turn round, and let me see how it is made at the back. Ah! I told Mademoiselle Leroe to make it in that style; that little watteau back is so very becoming to small girls. Turn round now slowly, and let me get the side view. Yes, it is a pretty dress; be sure you don't mess it. You are to come down with the other children to dessert. You had better go now, I am tired."

"But Mummy—Mumsy!"

"Don't call me Mummy or Mumsy, say mother. I don't like abbreviations."

"What's that?" asked Sibyl, knitting her brows.

"Mummy or Mumsy are abbreviations of a very sacred name."

"Sacred name!" said Sibyl, in a thoughtful tone. "Oh yes, I won't call you anything but mother. Mother is most lovely."

"Well, I hope you will be a good child, and not annoy me as you have been doing."

"Oh, mother darling, I didn't mean to vex you, but it was such a temptation, you know. You were never, never tempted, were you, mother? You are made so perfect, that you cannot understand what temptation means. I did so long to climb the trees, and I knew you would not like me spoil my pretty frock, and Freda lent me the brown holland. When I saw you, Mums—I mean, mother—I forgot about everything else but just that I had climbed a tree, and that I had been brave, although for a minute I felt a scrap giddy, and I wanted to tell you about what I had done, my ownest, most darling mother."

Mrs. Ogilvie sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Come here," she said. There was a sharpness in her tone which arrested the words on Sibyl's lips. "Look at me, take my hand, look steadily into my face. I have just five minutes to spare, and I wish to say something very grave and important, and you must listen attentively."

"Oh, yes, mother, I am listening; what is it?"

"Look at me. Are you attending?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Mother, Freda says she will give me a Persian kitten; the Persian cat has two, such beauties, snow-white. May I have one, mother?"

"Attend to me, and stop talking. You think a great deal of me, your mother, and you call me perfect. Now show that you put me in high esteem."

"That sounds very nice," thought Sibyl to herself. "Mother is just in her most beautiful humour. Of course I'll listen."

"I wish," continued the mother, and she turned slightly away from the child as she spoke, "I wish you to stop all that nonsense about your father and me. I wish you to understand that we are not perfect, either of us; we are just every-day, ordinary sort of people. As we happen to be your father and mother, you must obey us and do what we wish; but you make yourself, and us also, ridiculous when you talk as you do. I am perfectly sick of your poses, Sibyl."

"Poses!" cried Sibyl; "what's poses?"

"Oh, you are too tiresome; ask nurse to explain, or Miss Winstead, when you go home. Miss Winstead, if she is wise, will tell you that you must just turn round and go the other way. You must obey me, of course, and understand that I know the right way to train you; but you are not to talk of me as though I were an angel. I am nothing of the kind. I am an ordinary woman, with ordinary feelings and ordinary faults, and I wish you to be an ordinary little girl. I am very angry with you for your great rudeness to Lord Grayleigh. What did it mean?"

"Oh, mother! it meant—" Sibyl swallowed something in her throat. Her mother's speech was unintelligible; it hurt her, she did not exactly know why, but this last remark was an opening.

"Mother, I am glad you spoke of it. I could not, really and truly, help it."

"Don't talk nonsense. Now go away. Hortense is coming to dress me for dinner. Go."

"But, mother! one minute first, please—please."

"Go, Sibyl, obey me."

"It was 'cos Lord Grayleigh spoke against my—"

"Go, Sibyl, I won't listen to another word. I shall punish you severely if you do not obey me this instant."

"I am going," said the child, "but I cannot be—"

"Go. You are coming down to dessert tonight, and you are to speak properly to Lord Grayleigh. Those are my orders. Now go."

Hortense came in at that moment. She entered with that slight whirl which she generally affected, and which she considered truly Parisian. Somehow, in some fashion, Sibyl felt herself swept out of the room. She stood for a moment in the passage. There was a long glass at the further end, and it reflected a pink-robed little figure. The cheeks had lost their usual tender bloom, and the eyes had a bewildered expression. Sibyl rubbed her hands across them.

"I don't understand," she said to herself. "Perhaps I wasn't quite pretty enough, perhaps that was the reason, but I don't know. I think I'll go to my new nursery and sit down and think of father. Oh, I wish mother hadn't—of course it's all right, and I am a silly girl, and I get worser, not better, every day, and mother knows what is best for me; but she might have let me 'splain things. I wish I hadn't a pain here." Sibyl touched her breast with a pathetic gesture.

"It's 'cos of father I feel so bad, it's 'cos they told lies of father." She turned very slowly with the most mournful droop of her head in the direction of the apartment set aside for nurse and herself. She had thought much of this visit, and now this very first afternoon a blow had come. Her mother had told her to do a hard thing. She, Sibyl, was to be polite to Lord Grayleigh; she was to be polite to that dreadful, smiling man, with the fair hair and the keen eyes, who had spoken against her father. It was unfair, it was dreadful, to expect this of her.

"And mother would not even let me 'splain," thought the child.

"Hullo!" cried a gay voice; "hullo! and what's the matter with little Miss Beauty?" And

Sibyl raised her eyes, with a start, to encounter the keen, frank, admiring gaze of Gus.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, "aren't we fine! I say! you'll knock Freda and Mabel into next week, if you go on at this rate. But, come to the school-room; we want a game, and you can join."

"I can't, Gus," replied Sibyl.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I don't feel like playing games."

"You are quite white about the gills. I say! has anybody hurt you?"

"No, not exactly, Gus; but I want to be alone. I'll come by-and-by."

"Somebody wasn't square with her," thought Gus, as Sibyl turned away. "Queer little girl! But I like her all the same."

CHAPTER V.

Sibyl's conduct was exemplary at dessert. She was quiet, she was modest, she was extremely polite. When spoken to she answered in the most correct manner. When guests smiled at her, she gave them a set smile in return. She accepted just that portion of the dessert which her mother most wished her to eat, eschewing unwholesome sweets, and partaking mostly of grapes. Especially was she polite to Lord Grayleigh, who called her to his side, and even put his arm round her waist. He wondered afterwards why she shivered when he did this. But she stood upright as a dart, and looked him full in the face with those extraordinary eyes of hers.

At last the children's hour, as it was called, came to an end, and the four went round kissing and shaking hands with the different guests. Mrs. Ogilvie put her hand for an instant on Sibyl's shoulder.

"I am pleased with you," she said; "you behaved very nicely. Go to bed now."

"Will you come and see me, Mumsy—mother, I mean—before you go to bed?"

"Oh no, child, nonsense! you must be asleep hours before then. No, this is good-night. Now go quietly."

Sibyl did go quietly. Mrs. Ogilvie turned to her neighbour.

"That is such an absurd custom," she said; "I must break her of it."

"Break your little girl of what?" he asked. "She is a beautiful child," he added. "I congratulate you on having such a charming daughter."

"I have no doubt she will make a very pretty woman," replied Mrs. Ogilvie, "and I trust she will have a successful career; but what I was alluding to now was her insane wish that I should go and say good-night to her. Her father spoils that child dreadfully. He insists on her staying up to our late dinner, which in itself is quite against all my principles, and then will go up to her room every evening when he happens to be at home. She lies awake for him at night, and they talk sentiment to each other. Very bad, is it not; quite out of date."

"I don't know," answered Mr. Rochester; "if it is an old custom it seems to me it has good in it." As he spoke he thought again of the eager little face, the pathetic soft eyes, the pleading in the voice. Until within this last half-hour he had not known of Sibyl's existence; but from this instant she was to come into his heart and bear fruit.

Meanwhile the child went straight to her room.

"Won't you come to the school-room now?" asked Gus in a tone of remonstrance.

"No; mother said I was to go to bed," answered Sibyl.

"How proper and good you have turned," cried Mabel.

"Good-night," said Sibyl. She could be quite dignified when she pleased. She allowed the girls to kiss her, and she shook hands with Gus, and felt grown-up, and, on the whole, notwithstanding the unsatisfied feeling at her heart, rather pleased with herself. She entered the room she called the nursery, and it looked cheerful and bright. Old nurse had had the fire lit, and was sitting by it. A kettle steamed on the hob, and nurse's cup and saucer and teapot, and some bread and butter and cakes, were spread on the table. But as Sibyl came in the sense of satisfaction which she had felt for a moment or two dropped away from her like a mantle, and she only knew that the ache at her heart was worse than ever. She sat down quietly, and did not speak, but gazed fixedly into the fire.

"What is it, pet?" nurse said. "Is anything the matter?"

"No," answered Sibyl. "Nursie, can I read the Bible a bit?"

"Sakes alive!" cried nurse, for Sibyl had never been remarkable for any religious tendency, "to be sure, my darling," she answered. "I never go from home without my precious Bible. It is the one my mother gave me when I was a little girl. I'll fetch it for you, dearie."

"Thank you," replied Sibyl.

Nurse returned, and the much-read, much-worn Bible was placed reverently in Sibyl's hands.

"Now, my little darling," said nurse, "you look quite white. You'll just read a verse or two, and then you'll go off to your bed."

"I want to find a special verse," said Sibyl. "When I have read it I will go to bed." She knitted her brows and turned the pages in a puzzled, anxious way.

"What's fretting you, dear? I know the Bible, so to speak, from end to end. Can old nursie help you in any way?"

"I know the verse is somewhere, but I cannot find the place. I remember reading it, and it has come back to me to-night."

"What is it, dear?"

"'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.'"

"Oh, yes, love," answered nurse promptly, "that's in the Epistle of St. James, fourth chapter, sixth verse. I learned the whole of the Epistle for my mother when I was young, and I have never forgotten a word of it. Here it is, dear."

"But what are you fretting your head over that verse for?" asked the puzzled old woman; "there's some that I could find for you a deal more suitable to little ladies like yourself. There's a beautiful verse, for instance, which says, 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord.' That means all those in charge of you, dear, nurses and governesses and all. I heard its meaning explained once very clear, and that was how it was put."

"There is not a bit about nurses and governesses in the Bible," said Sibyl, who had no idea of being imposed upon, although she was in trouble. "Never mind that other verse now, nursie, it's not that I'm thinking of, it's the one you found about 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' It seems to 'splain things."

"What things, dear?"

"Why, about mother. Nursie, isn't my mother quite the very humblest woman in all the world?"

"Oh, my goodness me, no!" exclaimed the woman under her breath. "I wouldn't remark it, my dear," she said aloud.

"That's 'cos you know so very little. You can't never guess what my ownest mother said to me to-day, and I'm not going to tell you, only that verse comforts me, and I understand now."

Sibyl got up and asked nurse to take off her pink frock. She felt quite cheerful and happy again. She knelt down in her white nightdress and said her prayers. She always prayed for her father and mother in a peculiar way. She never asked God to give them anything, they had already got all that heart could wish. They were beautiful in person, they were lovely in character, they were perfect in soul. She could only thank God for them. So she thanked God now as usual.

"Thank You, Jesus, for giving me father and mother," said Sibyl, "and in especial for making my mother just so truly perfect that she is humble. She does not like me to think too much of her. It is because she is humble, and You give grace to the humble. It is a great comfort to me, Jesus, to know that, because I could not quite understand my mother afore dinner. Good-night, Jesus, I am going to sleep now; I am quite happy."

Sibyl got into bed, closed her eyes, and was soon sound asleep.

On the following Monday Lord Grayleigh went to town, and there he had a rather important interview with Philip Ogilvie.

"I failed to understand your letter," he said, "and have come to you for an explanation."

Ogilvie was looking worried and anxious.

"I thought my meaning plain enough," he replied, "but as you are here, I will answer you; and first, I want to put a question to you. Why do you wish me to be the assayer?"

"For many reasons; amongst others, because I wish to do you a good turn. For your position you are not too well off. This will mean several thousands a year to you, if the vein is as rich as we hope it will be. The alluvial we know is rich. It has washed at five ounces to the ton."

"But if there should not happen to be a rich vein beneath?" queried Ogilvie, and as he spoke he watched his companion narrowly.

Lord Grayleigh shrugged his shoulders. The action was significant.

"I see," cried Ogilvie. He was silent for a moment, then he sprang to his feet. "I have regarded you as my friend for some time, Grayleigh, and there have been moments when I have been proud of your acquaintanceship, but in the name of all that is honourable, and all that is virtuous, why will you mix up a pretended act of benevolence to me with—you know what it means—a fraudulent scheme? You are determined that there shall be a rich vein below the surface. In plain words, if there is not, you want a false assay of the Lombard Deeps. That is the plain English of it, isn't it?"

"Pooh! my dear Ogilvie, you use harsh words. Fraudulent! What does the world—our world, I mean—consist of? Those who make money, and those who lose it. It is a great competition of skill—a mere duel of wits. All is fair in love, war, and speculation."

"Your emendation of that old proverb may be *fin de siècle,* but it does not suit my notions," muttered Ogilvie, sitting down again.

Grayleigh looked keenly at him.

"You will be sorry for this," he said; "it means much to you. You would be quite safe, you know that."

"And what of the poor country parson, the widow, the mechanic? I grant they are fools; but—"

"What is the matter with you?" said Lord Grayleigh; "you never were so scrupulous."

"I don't know that I am scrupulous now. I shall be very glad to assay the mine for you, if I may give you a—"

"We need not enter into that," said Grayleigh, rising; "you have already put matters into words which had better never have been uttered. I will ask you to reconsider this: it is a task too important to decline without weighing all the *pros* and *cons.* You shall have big pay for your services; big pay, you understand."

"And it is that which at once tempts and repels me," said Ogilvie. Then he paused, and said abruptly, "How is Sibyl? Have you seen much of her?"

"Your little daughter? I saw her twice. Once, when she was very dirty, and rather rude to me, and a second time, when she was the perfection of politeness and good manners."

"Sibyl is peculiar," said Ogilvie, and his eyes gleamed with a flash of the same light in them which Sibyl's wore at intervals.

"She is a handsome child, it is a pity she is your only one, Ogilvie."

"Not at all," answered Ogilvie; "I never wish for another, she satisfies me completely."

"Well, to turn to the present matter," said Lord Grayleigh; "you will reconsider your refusal?"

"I would rather not."

"But if I as a personal favour beg you to do so."

"There is not the slightest doubt that the pay tempts me," said Ogilvie; "it would be a kindness on your part to close the matter now finally, to relieve me from temptation. But suppose I were to—to yield, what would the shareholders say?"

"They would be managed. The shareholders will expect to pay the engineer who assays the mine for them handsomely."

Ogilvie stood in a dubious attitude, Grayleigh went up and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I will assume," he said, "that you get over scruples which after all may have no foundation, for the mine may be all that we wish it to be. What I want to suggest is this. Someone must go to Australia to assay the Lombard Deeps. If you will not take the post we must get someone else to step into your shoes. The new claim was discovered by the merest accident, and the reports state it to be one of the richest that has ever been panned out. Of course that is as it may be. We will present you, if you give a good assay, with five hundred shares in the new syndicate. You can wait until the shares go up, and then sell out. You will clear thousands of pounds. We will also pay your expenses and compensate you handsomely for the loss of your time. This is Monday; we want you to start on Saturday. Give me your decision on Wednesday morning, I won't take a refusal now."

Ogilvie was silent; his face was very white, and his lips were compressed together. Soon afterwards the two men parted.

Lord Grayleigh returned to Grayleigh Manor by a late train, and Ogilvie went back to his empty house. Amongst other letters which awaited him was one with a big blot on the envelope. This blot was surrounded by a circle in red ink, and was evidently of great moment to the writer. The letter was addressed to "Philip Ogilvie, Esq.," in a square, firm, childish hand, and the great blot stood a little away from the final Esquire. It gave the envelope an altogether striking and unusual appearance. The flap was sealed with violet wax, and had an impression on it which spelt Sibyl. Ogilvie, when he received this letter, took it up tenderly, looked at the blot on the cover of the envelope, glanced behind him in a shamefaced way, pressed his lips to the violet seal which contained his little daughter's name, then sitting down in his chair, he opened the envelope.

Sibyl was very good at expressing her feelings in words, but as yet she was a poor scribe, and her orthography left much to be desired. Her letter was somewhat short, and ran as follows:—

"DADDY DEAR,—Here's a blot to begin, and the blot means a kiss. I will put sum more at the end of the letter. Pleas kiss all the kisses for they com from the verry botom of my hart. I have tried Daddy to be good cos of you sinse I left home, but I am afraid I have been rather norty. Mother gets more purfect evry day. She is bewtiful and humbel. Mother said she wasn't purfect but she is, isn't she father? I miss you awful, speshul at nights, cos mother thinks its good for me not to lie awake for her to come and kiss me. But you never think that and you always com, and I thank God so much for having gived you to me father.

"Your SIBYL.

"Father, what does 'scroopolus' mean? I want to know speshul.—SIB."

The letter finished with many of these strange irregular blots, which Ogilvie kissed tenderly, and then folded up the badly-spelt little epistle, and slipped it into his pocket-book. Then he drew his chair forward to where his big desk stood, and, leaning his elbows on it, passed his hands through his thick, short hair. He was puzzled as he had never been in all his life before. Should he go, or should he stay? Should he yield to temptation, and become rich and prosperous, or should he retain his honour, and face the consequences? He knew well—he had seen them coming for a long time—the consequences he was about to face would not be pleasant. They spelt very little short of ruin. He suddenly opened a drawer, and took from its depths a sheaf of accounts which different tradespeople had sent in to his wife. Mrs. Ogilvie was hopelessly reckless and extravagant. Money in her hand was like water; it flowed away as she touched it. Her jeweller's bill alone amounted to thousands of pounds. If Ogilvie accepted the offer now made to him he might satisfy these pressing creditors, and not deprive Sibyl of her chance of an income by-and-by. Sibyl! As the thought of her face came to him, he groaned inwardly. He wished sometimes that God had never given him such a treasure.

"I am unworthy of my little Angel," he said to himself. Then he started up and began to pace the room. "And yet I would not be without her for all the wealth in the world, for all the greatness and all the fame," he cried; "she is more to me than everything else on earth. If ever she finds out what I really am, I believe I shall go raving mad. I must keep a straight front, I must keep as clean as I can for Sibyl's sake. O God, help me to be worthy of her!"

He read the badly-spelt, childish letter once again, and then he thrust the bills out of sight and thought of other liabilities which he himself had incurred, till his thoughts returned to the tempting offer made to him.

"Shall I risk it?" he said to himself. "Shall I risk the chance of the mine being really good, and go to Australia and see if it is as rich as the prospectuses claim it to be? But suppose it is not? Well, in that case I am bound to make it appear so. Five ounces of gold to every ton; it seems *bonâ fide* enough. If it is *bonâ fide,* why should not I have my share of the wealth? It is as legitimate a way of earning money as any other," and he swerved again in the direction of Lord Grayleigh's offer.

Lord Grayleigh had given him until Wednesday to decide.

"I am sorry to seem to force your hand," that nobleman had said to him at parting, "but if you distinctly refuse we must send another man, and whoever goes must start on Saturday."

A trip to Australia, how he would enjoy it! To be quite away from London and his present conventional life. The only pain was the thought of parting with Sibyl. But he would do his business quickly, and come back and clasp her in his arms, and kiss her again and look into her eyes and—turn round; yes, he would turn short round and choose the right path, and be what she really thought him, a good man. In a very small degree, he would be the sort of man his child imagined him.

As these thoughts flashed before his mind he forgot that dinner was cooling in the dining-room, that he himself had eaten nothing for some hours, and that a curious faintness which he had experienced once or twice before had stolen over him. He did not like it nor quite understand it. He rose, crossed the room, and was about to ring the bell when a sudden spasm of most acute pain passed like a knife through his chest. He was in such agony that for a moment he was unable to stir. The sharpness of the pain soon went off, and he sank into a chair faint and trembling. He was now well enough to ring his bell. He did so, and the footman appeared.

"Bring me brandy, and be quick," said Ogilvie.

The man started when he saw his face. He soon returned with the stimulant, which Ogilvie drank off. The agony in his chest subsided by degrees, and he was able to go into the dining-room and even to eat. He had never before had such terrible and severe pain, and now he was haunted by the memory of his father, who had died suddenly of acute disease of the heart.

After dinner he went, as usual, to his club, where he met a friend whom he liked. They chatted about many things, and the fears and apprehensions of the puzzled man dropped gradually from him. It was past midnight when Ogilvie returned home. He had now forgotten all about the pain in his chest. It had completely passed away. He felt as well and vigorous as ever. In the night, however, he slept badly, had tiresome dreams, and was much haunted by the thought of his child. If by any chance he were to die now! If, for instance, he died on his way to Australia, he would leave Sibyl badly provided for. A good deal of his private means had already been swallowed up by his own and his wife's extravagant living, and what was left of it had been settled absolutely on his wife at the time of their marriage. Although, of course, this money at her mother's death would revert to Sibyl, he had a presentiment, which he knew was founded on a firm basis, that Mrs. Ogilvie might be careless, inconsiderate—not kind, in the true sense of the word, to the little girl. If it came to be a tussle between Sibyl's needs and her mother's fancied necessities, Ogilvie's intuitions told him truly that Sibyl would go to the wall.

"I must do something better than that for my little daughter," thought the man. "I will not go to Australia until I have decided that point. If I go, I shall make terms, and it will be for Sibyl's sake."

But again that uncomfortable, tiresome conscience of his began to speak; and that conscience told him that if he went to Australia for the purpose of blinding the eyes of possible shareholders in London, he would in reality be doing the very worst possible thing for his child.

He tossed about between one temptation and another for the remainder of the night, and arose in the morning unrefreshed. As he was dressing, however, a thought came to him which he hailed as a possible relief. Why not do the right thing right from the beginning; tell Grayleigh that the proposed commission to visit Australia was altogether distasteful to him; that he washed his hands of the great new syndicate; that they might sweep in their gold, but he would have nothing to say to it? At the same time he might insure his life for ten thousand pounds. It would be a heavy interest to pay, no doubt, and they would probably have to live in a smaller house, and he and his wife would have to put down their expenses in various ways, but he would have the comfort of knowing that whatever happened Sibyl would not be without means of subsistence.

"When I have done that, and absolutely provided for her future, I shall have a great sense of rest," thought the man. "I will go and see Dr. Rashleigh, of the Crown and Life Insurance Company, as soon as ever I get to the City. That is a happy thought."

He smiled cheerfully to himself, ran downstairs, and ate a hearty breakfast. A letter from his wife lay upon his plate. He did not even open it. He thrust it into his pocket and went off to the City, telling his servant as he did so that he would be back to dinner.

As soon as he got to his office he read his letters, gave his clerks directions, and went at once to see Dr. Rashleigh, of the Insurance Company.

Rashleigh happened to be one of his special friends, and he knew his hours. It was a little unusual to expect him to examine him for an insurance without an appointment; but he believed, in view of the possible visit to Australia, that Rashleigh would be willing to overlook ceremony.

He arrived at the office, saw one of the clerks downstairs, heard that Rashleigh was in and would soon be disengaged, and presently was shown into the doctor's consulting room.

Rashleigh was a grey-haired man of about sixty years of age. He spent a couple of hours every day in the consulting room of the Crown and Life Insurance Company. He rose now, and extended his hand with pleasure when Ogilvie appeared.

"My dear Ogilvie, and what do you want with me? Have you at last listened to my entreaties that you should insure your life in a first-class office?"

"Something of the kind," said Ogilvie, forcing a smile, for again that agony which had come over him yesterday assailed him. He knew that his heart was throbbing faintly, and he remembered once more that his father had died of heart disease. Oh, it was all nonsense; of course he had nothing to fear. He was a man in his prime, not much over thirty—he was all right.

Rashleigh asked him a few questions.

"I may have to go to Australia rather suddenly," said Ogilvie, "and I should like first to insure my life. I want to settle the money on my child before I leave home."

"How large a sum do you propose to insure for?" asked the doctor.

"I have given the particulars to the clerk downstairs. I should like to insure for ten thousand pounds."

"Well, I daresay that can be managed. You are an excellent client, and quite a young man. Now just let me sound your lungs, and listen to your heart."

Ogilvie removed his necktie, unbuttoned his shirt, and placed himself in the doctor's hands.

Dr. Rashleigh made his examination without comment, slowly and carefully. At last it was over.

"Well?" said Ogilvie, just glancing at him. "It's all right, I suppose."

"It is not the custom for a doctor at an insurance office to tell his patient anything about the result of the examination," was Rashleigh's answer. "You'll hear all in good time."

"But there really is no time to lose, and you are an old friend. You look grave. If it cannot be done, of course it cannot, but I should like to know."

"When do you propose to go to Australia?"

"I may not go at all. In fact, if—" Ogilvie suddenly leaned against the table. Once again he felt faint and giddy. "If this is all right, I shall probably not go."

"But suppose it is not all right?"

"Then I sail on Saturday."

"I may as well tell you the truth," said Rashleigh; "you are a brave man. My dear fellow, the office cannot insure you."

"What do you mean?"

"Heart," said Rashleigh.

"Heart! Mine? Not affected?"

"Yes."

"Seriously?"

"It is hard to answer that question. The heart is a strange organ, and capable of a vast amount of resuscitation; nevertheless, in your case the symptoms are grave; the aortic valve is affected. It behoves you to be very careful."

"Does this mean that I—" Ogilvie dropped into a chair. "Rashleigh," he said suddenly, "I had a horrible attack last night. I forgot it this morning when I came to you, but it was horrible while it lasted. I thought myself, during those moments of torture, within a measurable—a very measurable distance of the end."

"Describe your sensations," said Rashleigh. Ogilvie did so.

"Now, my dear fellow, I have a word to say. This insurance cannot be done. But, for yourself, you must avoid excitement. I should like to prescribe a course of living for you. I have studied the heart extensively."

"Will nothing put me straight? Cure me, I mean?"

"I fear not."

"Well, good-bye, Rashleigh; I will call round to see you some evening."

"Do. I should like you to have the advice of a specialist, Anderson, the greatest man in town on the heart."

"But where is the use? If you cannot cure me, he cannot."

"You may live for years and years, and die of something else in the end."

"Just what was said to my father, who did not live for years and years," answered the man. "I won't keep you any longer, Rashleigh."

He left the office and went down into the street. As he crossed the Poultry and got once more into the neighbourhood of his own office, one word kept ringing in his ears, "Doomed."

He arrived at his office and saw his head clerk.

"You don't look well, Mr. Ogilvie."

"Never mind about my looks, Harrison," replied Ogilvie. "I have a great deal to do, and need your best attention."

"Certainly, sir; but, all the same, you don't look well."

"Looks are nothing," replied Ogilvie. "I shall soon be all right. Harrison, I am off to Australia on Saturday."

CHAPTER VI.

On that same Tuesday Lord Grayleigh spent a rather anxious day. For many reasons it would never do for him to press Ogilvie, and yet if Ogilvie declined to go to Queensland matters might not go quite smoothly with the new Syndicate. He was the most trusted and eminent mine assayer in London, and had before now done useful work for Grayleigh, who was chairman of several other companies. Up to the present Grayleigh, a thoroughly worldly and hard-headed man of business, had made use of Ogilvie entirely to his own benefit and satisfaction. It was distinctly unpleasant to him, therefore, to find that just at the most crucial moment in his career, when everything depended on Ogilvie's subservience to his chief's wishes, he should turn restive.

"That sort of man with a conscience is intolerable," thought Lord Grayleigh, and then he wondered what further lever he might bring to bear in order to get Ogilvie to consent to the Australian visit.

He was thinking these thoughts, pacing up and down alone in a retired part of the grounds, when he heard shrill screams of childish laughter, and the next moment Sibyl, in one of her white frocks, the flounces badly torn, her hat off and hair in wild disorder, rushed past. She was closely followed by Freda, Mabel and Gus being not far behind.

"Hullo!" said Lord Grayleigh; "come here, little woman, and account for yourself."

Sibyl paused in her mad career. She longed to say, "I'm not going to account for myself to you;" but she remembered her mother's injunction. She had been on her very best behaviour all Sunday, Monday, and up to now on Tuesday, but her fit of goodness was coming to an end. She was in the mood to be obstreperous, naughty, and wilful; but the thought of her mother, who was so gently following in the path of the humble, restrained her.

"If mother, who is an angel, a perfect angel, can think herself naughty and yet wish me to be good, I ought to help her by being as good as I possibly can," she thought.

So she stopped and looked at Lord Grayleigh with the wistful, puzzled expression which at once repelled and attracted him. His own daughters also drew up panting.

"We were chasing Sib," they said; "she challenged us. She said that, although she does live in town, she could beat us."

"And it looked uncommonly like it when I saw you all," was Grayleigh's response. "Sibyl has long legs for her age."

Sibyl looked down at the members in question, and put on a charming pout. Grayleigh laughed, and going up to her side, laid his hand on her shoulder.

"I saw your father yesterday. Shall I tell you about him?"

This, indeed, was a powerful bait. Sibyl's soft lips trembled slightly. The wistful look in her eyes became appealing.

"Pathetic eyes, more pathetic than any dog's," thought Lord Grayleigh. He took her hand.

"You and I will walk by ourselves for a little," he said. "Run away, children. Sibyl will join you in a few moments."

Sibyl, as if mesmerised, now accompanied Lord Grayleigh. She disliked her present position immensely, and yet she wondered if it was given to her by Lord Jesus, as a special opportunity which she was on no account to neglect. Should she tell Lord Grayleigh what she really thought of him? But for her mother she would not have hesitated for a moment, but that mother had been very kind to her during the last two days, and Sibyl had enjoyed studying her character from a new point of view. Mother was polite to people, even though they were not quite perfect. Mother always looked sweet and tidy and ladylike, and beautifully dressed. Mother never romped, nor tore her clothes, nor climbed trees. It was an uninteresting life from Sibyl's point of view, and yet, perhaps, it was the right life. Up to the present the child had never seriously thought of her own conduct at all. She accepted the fact with placidity that she herself was not good. It was rather interesting to be "not good," and yet to live in the house with two perfectly angelic beings. It seemed to make their goodness all the whiter. At the present moment she longed earnestly to be "not good."

Lord Grayleigh, holding her hand, advanced in the direction of a summer-house.

"We will sit here and talk, shall we?" he said.

"Yes, shall us?" replied Sibyl.

Lord Grayleigh smiled; he placed himself in a comfortable chair, and motioned Sibyl to take another. She drew a similar chair forward, placed it opposite to her host, and sat on it. It was a high chair, and her feet did not reach the ground.

"I 'spect I'm rather short for my age," she said, looking down and speaking in a tone of apology.

"Why, how old are you?" he asked.

"Quite old," she replied gravely; "I was eight at five minutes past seven Monday fortnight back."

"You certainly have a vast weight of years on your head," he replied, looking at her gravely.

She did not see the sarcasm, she was thinking of something else. Suddenly she looked him full in the face.

"You called me away from the other children 'cause you wanted to speak about father, didn't you? Please tell me all about him. Is he quite well?"

"Of course he is."

"Did he ask about me?"

"Yes, he asked me how you were."

"And what did you say?"

"I replied, with truth, that I had twice had the pleasure of seeing you; once when you were very rude to me, once when you were equally polite."

Sibyl's eyes began to dance.

"What are you thinking of, eight-year-old?" asked Lord Grayleigh.

"Of you," answered Sibyl with promptitude.

"Come, that's very interesting; what about me? Now, be quite frank and tell me why you were rude to me the first time we met?"

"May I?" said Sibyl with great eagerness. "Do you really, truly mean it?"

"I certainly mean it."

"You won't tell—mother?"

"I won't tell—mother," said Lord Grayleigh, mimicking her manner.

Sibyl gave a long, deep sigh.

"I am glad," she said with emphasis. "I don't want my ownest mother to be hurt. She tries so hard, and she is so beautiful and perfect. It's most 'portant that I should speak to you, and if you will promise—"

"I have promised; whatever you say shall be secret. Now, out with it."

"You won't like it," said Sibyl.

"You must leave me to judge of that."

"I am going to be fwightfully rude."

"Indeed! that is highly diverting."

"I don't know what diverting is, but it will hurt you."

"I believe I can survive the pain."

Sibyl looked full at him then.

"Are you laughing at me?" she said, and she jumped down from her high chair.

"I would not dream of doing so."

The curious amused expression died out of Lord Grayleigh's eyes. He somehow felt that he was confronting Sibyl's father with all those unpleasant new scruples in full force.

"Speak away, little girl," he said, "I promise not to laugh. I will listen to you with respect.

You are an uncommon child, very like your father."

"Thank you for saying that, but it isn't true; for father's perfect, and I'm not. I will tell you now why I was rude, and why I am going to be rude again, monstrous rude. It is because you told lies."

"Indeed!" said Lord Grayleigh, pretending to be shocked. "Do you know that that is a shocking accusation? If a man, for instance, had said that sort of thing to another man a few years back, it would have been a case for swords."

"I don't understand what that means," said Sibyl.

"For a duel: you have heard of a duel?"

"Oh, in history, of course," said Sibyl, her eyes sparkling, "and one man kills another man. They run swords through each other until one of them gets killed dead. I wish I was a man."

"Do you really want to run a sword through me?"

Sibyl made no answer to this; she shut her lips firmly, her eyes ablaze.

"Come," said Lord Grayleigh, "it is unfair to accuse a man and not to prove your accusation. What lies have I told?"

"About my father."

"Hullo! I suppose I am stupid, but I fail to understand."

"I will try and 'splain. I didn't know that you was stupid, but you do tell lies."

"Well, go on; you are putting it rather straight, you know."

"I want to."

"Fire away then."

"You told someone—I don't know the name —-you told somebody that my father was unscroopolus."

"Indeed," said Lord Grayleigh. He coloured, and looked uneasy. "I told somebody—that is diverting."

"It's not diverting," said Sibyl, "it's cruel, it's mean, it's wrong; it's lies—black lies. Now you know."

"But who did I tell?"

"Somebody, and somebody told me—I'm not going to tell who told me."

"Even suppose I did say anything of the sort, what do you know about that word?"

"I found it out. An unscroopolus person is a person who doesn't act right. Do you know that my father never did wrong, never from the time he was borned? My father is quite perfect, God made him so."

"Your father is a very nice fellow, Sibyl."

"He is much better than nice, he is perfect; he never did anything wrong. He is perfect, same as Lord Jesus is perfect."

The little girl looked straight out into the summer landscape. Her lips trembled, on each cheek there flushed a crimson rose.

Lord Grayleigh shuffled his feet. Had anyone in all the world told him that he would have listened quietly, and with a sense of respect, to such a story as he was now hearing, he would have roared with laughter. But he was not at all inclined to laugh now that he found himself face to face with Sibyl.

"And mother is perfect, too," she said, turning and facing him.

Then he did laugh; he laughed aloud.

"Oh, no," he said.

"So you don't wonder that I hate you," continued Sibyl, taking no notice of that last remark. "It's 'cos you like to tell lies about good people. My father is perfect, and you called him unscroopolus. No wonder I hate you."

"Listen now, little girl." Lord Grayleigh took the hot, trembling hand, and drew the child close to his side.

"Don't shrink away, don't turn from me," he said; "I am not so bad as you make me out. If I did make use of such an expression, I have forgotten it. Men of the world say lots of things that little girls don't understand. Little girls of eight years old, if they are to grow up nice and good, and self-respecting, must take the world on trust. So you must take me on trust, and believe that even if I did say what you accuse me of saying, I still have a great respect for your father. I think him a right down *good* fellow."

"The best in all the world?" queried Sibyl.

"I am sure at least of one thing, that no little girl ever had a fonder father."

"And you own up you told a lie? You do own up that father's quite perfect?"

"Men like myself don't care to own themselves in the wrong," said Lord Grayleigh, "and the fact is—listen, you queer little mortal—I don't like perfect people. It is true that I have never met any."

"You have met my father and my mother."

"Come, Sibyl, shall we make a compromise? I like you, I want you to like me. Forget that I said what I myself have forgotten, and believe that I have a very great respect for your father. Come, if he were here, he would ask you to be friendly with me."

"Would he?" said the child. She looked wistful and interested. "There are lots of things I want to be 'splained to me," she said. Then, after a moment, "I'll think whether I'll be friends with you, and I'll let you know, may be to-morrow."

As she said the last words she pushed aside his detaining hand, and ran out of the summer-house. He heard her eager, quick steps as she ran away, and a moment later there came her gay laughter back to him from the distance. She had joined the other children, and was happy in her games.

"Poor little maid!" he said to himself, and he sat on grave and silent. He did not like to confess it, but Sibyl's words had affected him.

"The faith she has in that poor fellow is quite beautiful," was his inward thought; "it seems a sin to break it. If he does go to Queensland it will be broken and somewhat rudely. I could send Atherton. Atherton is not the man for our purpose. His report won't affect the public as Ogilvie's report would, but he has never yet been troubled by conscience, and Sibyl's faith will be unshaken. It is worth considering. It is not every man who has got a little daughter like Sibyl."

These thoughts came and worried him; presently he rose with a laugh.

"What am I," he said to himself, "to have my way disturbed by the words of a mere child?" And just then he heard the soft rustle of a silk dress, and, looking up, he saw the pretty face of Mrs. Ogilvie.

"Come in and sit down," he said, jumping up and offering her a chair. "It is cool and yet not draughty in here. I have just had the pleasure of a conversation with your little daughter."

"Indeed! I do hope she has been conducting herself properly."

"I must not repeat what she said; I can only assure you that she behaved charmingly—charmingly."

"I am so relieved; Sibyl so often does not behave charmingly, that you don't wonder that I should ask you the question."

"She has a very great respect for you," said Lord Grayleigh; "it makes me think you a better woman to have a child regard you as she does."

Mrs. Ogilvie fidgeted; she had seated herself on a low rustic chair, and she looked pretty and elegant in her white summer dress, and her hat softening the light in her beautiful eyes. She toyed with her white lace parasol, and looked, as Sibyl had looked a short time ago, across the lovely summer scene; but in her eyes there shone the world with all its temptations and all its lures, and Sibyl's had made acquaintance with the stars, and the lofty peaks of high principle, and honour, and knew nothing of the real world.

Lord Grayleigh, in a kind of confused way which he did not himself understand, noticed the difference in the glance of the child and the woman.

"Your little girl has the highest opinion of you," he repeated; "the very highest."

"And I wish she would not talk or think such nonsense," said Mrs. Ogilvie, in a burst of irritation. "You know well that I am not what Sibyl thinks me. I am an ordinary, every-day woman. I hope I am"—she smiled—"charming."

"You are that, undoubtedly," said the nobleman, slightly bowing his head.

"I hope I am what a man most likes in a woman, agreeable, charming, and fairly amiable; but I am no saint, and I don't want to be. Sibyl's attitude towards me is therefore most irritating, and I am doing my utmost—"

"You are doing what?" said Lord Grayleigh. He rose, and stood by the summer-house door.

"To open her eyes."

"I would not if I were you," he said, gravely; "it is not often that a child has her faith. To shake it means a great deal."

"What are you talking about now?"

"I don't often read my Bible," he continued, "but, of course, I did as a boy—most boys do. My mother was a good woman. I am thinking of something said in that Holy Book."

"You are quite serious; I never knew you in this mood before."

"I must tell it to you. 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the depths of the sea.' "

"How unpleasant," said Mrs. Ogilvie, after a pause, "and I rather fail to see the connection. Shall we change the subject?"

"With pleasure."

"What arrangement did you make with Philip yesterday?"

"I made no absolute arrangement, but I think he will do according to your wishes."

"Then he will assay the mine, act as the engineer to the company?"

"Precisely."

"Has he promised?"

"Not yet, but my impression is that he will do it."

"What does assaying the mine mean?"

Mrs. Ogilvie knitted her pretty dark brows, and looked as inquisitive and childish at that moment as Sibyl herself.

"To assay a mine means to find out accurately what it contains," said Lord Grayleigh. Once again his eyes turned away from his questioner. He had very little respect for Mrs. Ogilvie's conscience, but he did not want to meet anyone's gaze at that instant.

"Nevertheless," he continued, after a pause, "your husband has not definitely promised, and it is on the cards that he may refuse."

"He will be a madman if he does," cried Mrs. Ogilvie, and she stamped her pretty foot impatiently.

"According to Sibyl's light, he will be the reverse of that; but then, Sibyl, and your husband also, believe in such a thing as conscience."

"Philip's conscience!" said the wife, with a sneer; "what next?"

"It appears to me," said Lord Grayleigh, "that he has an active one."

"It has come to life very quickly, then. This is mere humbug."

"Let me speak. To be frank with you, I respect your husband's conscience; and, perhaps, if you respected it more—"

"I really will not stay here to be lectured," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "It is to your advantage, doubtless, that Philip should do something for you; it must be to your advantage, for you are going to pay him well. Will he do it, or will he not? That is the question I want answered."

"And I cannot answer it, for I do not know."

"But you think he will?"

"That is my impression."

"You can, at least, tell me what occurred."

"I can give you an outline of what occurred. I made him an offer to go to Queensland."

"To go where?" said Mrs. Ogilvie, looking slightly startled.

"As the mine happens to be in Queensland, how can he assay it in England?"

"I didn't know."

"Yes, if he does anything, he must go to Queensland. He must see the mine or mines himself; his personal report is essential. He will be paid well, and will receive a large number of shares."

"What do you mean by being paid well?"

"He will have his expenses, and something over."

"Something over! that is a very elastic term."

"In your husband's case it will mean thousands."

"Oh, I see; and then the shares?"

"The shares will practically make him a rich man."

"Then of course he will consent. I will go at once, and send him a line." She turned to leave the summer-house. Lord Grayleigh followed her. He laid his hand for an instant on her slim arm.

"If I were you," he said, and there was an unwonted tremble in his voice as he spoke, "if I were you, upon my honour, I'd leave him alone."

"Leave him alone now? Why should not the wife influence the husband for his own good?"

"Very well," said Lord Grayleigh; "I only ventured to make a suggestion."

She looked at him in a puzzled way, raised her brows, and said:

"I never found you so disagreeable before." She then left the summer-house.

Lord Grayleigh stood still for a moment, then, with quick strides, he went in the direction of the shrubbery. Sibyl, hot, excited, breathless after her game, did not even see him. He called her and she stopped.

"May I speak to you?" he said. He had the courteous manner to her which he did not vouchsafe to many of his gay lady acquaintances.

She ran to his side at once.

"Don't you want to send your father a letter by this post?"

"Yes, of course; is there time?"

"I will make time; go into the house and write to him."

"But why?"

"He would like to hear from you."

"Do you want me to say anything special?"

"Nothing special; write to him from your heart, that is all." And then Lord Grayleigh turned away in the direction of his stables. He ordered the groom to saddle his favourite horse, and was soon careering across country. Sibyl's letter to her father was short, badly spelt, and brimful of love. Mrs. Ogilvie's was also short, and brimful of worldliness.

The two letters, each as wide as the poles apart in spirit and in intention, met in the post-box, and were each carried as rapidly as mail trains could take them to the metropolis.

On the next morning these letters lay beside Philip Ogilvie's plate at breakfast. Sibyl's was well blotted and was sealed with her favourite violet seal. Mrs. Ogilvie's was trim, neat, and without a blemish. Ogilvie read them both, first the mother's, then the child's. Sibyl's was almost all kisses: hardly any words, just blots and kisses. Ogilvie did not press his lips to the kisses this time. He read the letter quickly, thrust it into his pocket, and once more turned his attention to what his wife had said. He smiled sarcastically as he read. The evening before he had written to Lord Grayleigh to accept the proffered engagement for Australia. The die was cast.

CHAPTER VII.

The following letter reached Philip Ogilvie late that same evening:—

"My Dear Ogilvie,

"Your decision is naturally all that can be desired, and I only hope you may never live to regret it. I have, most unfortunately, given my ankle a bad sprain. I had a fall yesterday when out riding, and am obliged to lie up for a day or two. There is much that I should wish to talk over with you before you go to Queensland. Can you come down here to-morrow by the first train? I will not detain you an hour longer than I can help. All other arrangements are in the hands of my agents, Messrs. Spielmann & Co.

"Yours sincerely,

"Grayleigh."

Ogilvie read this letter quickly. He knit his brow as he did so. It annoyed him a good deal.

"I did not want to go there," he thought. "I am doing this principally for the sake of the child. I can arrange all financial matters through

Spielmann. Grayleigh wants this thing done; I alone can do it to his satisfaction and to the satisfaction of the public. He must pay me—what he pays will be Sibyl's, the provision for her future. But I don't want to see the child—until all this dirty work is over. If I come back things may be altered. God only knows what may have occurred. The mine may be all right, there may be deliverance, but I didn't want to see her before I go. It is possible that I may not be able to keep my composure. There are a hundred things which make an interview between the child and me undesirable."

He thought and thought, and at last rose from his chair and began to pace the room. He had not suffered from his heart since his interview with Dr. Rashleigh. He gave it but scant consideration now.

"If I have a fatal disease it behooves me to act as if I were absolutely sound," he said to himself. And he had so acted after the first shock of Rashleigh's verdict had passed off. But he did not like the thought of seeing Sibyl. Still, Grayleigh's letter could not be lightly disregarded. If Grayleigh wished to see him and could not come to town, it was essential that he should go to him.

He rang his bell and sent off a telegram to the effect that he would arrive at Grayleigh Manor at an early hour on the following day.

This telegram Lord Grayleigh showed to Mrs. Ogilvie before she went to bed that night.

"He has consented to go, as of course you are well aware," said Lord Grayleigh, "and he comes here to see me to-morrow. But I would not say anything about his departure for Queensland to your little daughter, until after his visit. He may have something himself to say in the matter. Let him, if he wishes it, be the one to break it to her."

"But why should not the child know? How ridiculous you are!"

"That is exactly as her father pleases," replied Lord Grayleigh. "I have a kind of intuition that he may want to tell her himself. Anyhow, I trust you will oblige me in the matter."

Mrs. Ogilvie pouted. She was not enjoying herself as much at Grayleigh Manor as she had expected, and, somehow or other, she felt that she was in disgrace. This was by no means an agreeable sensation. She wondered why she was not in higher spirits. To visit Australia now-a-days was a mere nothing. Her husband would be back again, a rich man, in six months at the farthest. During those six months she herself might have a good time. There were several country houses where she might visit. Her visiting list was already nearly full. She would take Sibyl with her, although Sibyl sometimes was the reverse of comforting; but it looked effective to see the handsome mother and the beautiful child together, and Sibyl, when she did not go too far, said very pathetic and pretty things about her. Oh yes, she and her little daughter would have a good time, while the husband and father was earning money for them in Australia: while the husband and father was raking in gold, they might really enjoy themselves.

As she thought of this, Mrs. Ogilvie felt so light-hearted that she could have skipped. Those debts which had weighed so on what she was pleased to call her conscience, would be liquidated once and for all, and in the future she would have plenty of money. It was the be-all of existence to her feeble soul. She would have it in abundance in the time which lay before her.

"Philip is a wise man. It was very silly of him to hesitate and make a fuss," she thought; "but he has decided wisely, as I knew he would. I shall give him a kiss when I see him, and tell him that I am quite pleased with him."

She went to bed, therefore, cheerful, and the next morning put on her very prettiest dress in order to meet her husband.

Ogilvie walked from the little station, which was only half a mile away. Mrs. Ogilvie, going slowly up the avenue, saw him coming to meet her. She stood under the shade of a great overhanging beech tree, and waited until he appeared.

"Well, Mildred, and how are you?" said her husband. He took her hand, and, bending forward, brushed the lightest of kisses against her cheek.

"Quite well," she replied. "Is not the day pleasant? I am so glad about everything, Phil. But you don't look quite the thing yourself. Have you taken cold, or suffered from one of those nasty rheumatic attacks?"

"I am all right," he answered shortly. "I have a very few moments to be here, as I want to catch the 12:30 back. Do you know if Lord Grayleigh is anywhere to be found?"

"I saw him half an hour ago. I think you will find him in the smoking-room. He is expecting you."

"And"—Ogilvie glanced to right and left—"the child?"

"She is with the other children. Shall I send her to you?"

"Not yet."

"It is so nice of you to go, Phil; it will do you no end of good. You will enjoy your voyage," continued Mrs. Ogilvie, turning now and laying her hand on her husband's arm.

Mr. Rochester, who was quite a young man himself, and was deeply occupied at this time with thoughts of love and marriage, happened to see the pair as they sauntered by together. He knew nothing, of course, of Ogilvie's intended visit to Australia, nor was he in any sense of the word behind the scenes. On the contrary, he thought that Mrs. Ogilvie and her husband made a perfect picture of beautiful love between husband and wife.

"It is good of you," pursued Mrs. Ogilvie, turning once more to her husband. "I am greatly obliged. I am more than obliged, I am relieved and—and satisfied. We shall have a happy life together when you come back. There are, of course, little matters we ought to talk over before you go."

"Debts, you mean," said Ogilvie bluntly. "I opened your bills in your absence. They will be—"

"Oh, Phil!" Mrs. Ogilvie's face turned very white.

"I will speak about them before I leave," he continued; "now I must find Grayleigh."

"Is it true that you are going on Saturday?"

"Quite true."

"Had I not better return to town with you? There will be several things to put in order."

"I can write to you, Mildred. Now that you are here you had better stay here. The change will be good for you. You need not return to the house in town before next week."

"If you really don't want me, I am certainly enjoying myself here."

"I don't want you," he replied, but as he spoke his grey eyes looked wistful. He turned for an instant and glanced at her. He noted the sunny, lovely hair, the agile, youthful, rounded figure. Once he had loved her passionately.

"Sibyl will be delighted to see you," continued Mrs. Ogilvie. "She has been, on the whole, behaving very nicely. Of course, making both friends and foes, as is her usual impetuous way."

"That reminds me," said Ogilvie. "I shall see Sibyl before I leave; but that reminds me."

"Of what?"

"I do not wish her to be told."

"Told what? What do you mean? My dear Phil, you are eccentric."

"I have no time to dispute the point, Mildred. I wish to give one hasty direction, which is to be obeyed. Sibyl is not to be told that I am going to Australia."

"What, never?"

"She must be told when I am gone, but not till then. I will write to her, and thus break the news. She is not to be told to-day, not until she gets home, you understand? I won't go at all if you tell her."

"Oh, of course, I understand," said Mrs. Ogilvie, in a frightened way; "but why should not the child hear what really is good tidings?"

"I do not wish it. Now, have you anything further to say, for I must see Lord Grayleigh immediately?"

Mrs. Ogilvie clutched her husband's arm.

"You will leave me plenty of money when you go, will you not?"

"You shall have a bank-book and an account, but you must be careful. My affairs are not in the most prosperous condition, and your bills are terribly heavy."

"My bills! but I really—"

"We will not dispute them. They shall be paid before I go."

"Oh, my dear Philip, and you are not angry?"

"They shall be paid, Mildred. The liquidation of your debts is part of the reward for taking up this loathsome work."

"Philip, how ridiculously morbid you are!"

The husband and wife walked slower and slower. Ogilvie saw Grayleigh standing on the steps.

"There is Lord Grayleigh," he said. "I must go at once. Yes, the bills will be paid." He laid his hand for a moment on her shoulder.

"There is nothing else, is there, Mildred?"

"No," she began, then she hesitated.

"What more?"

"A trinket, it took my fancy—a diamond cross—you noticed it. I could not resist it."

"How much?" said the man. His face was very stern and white, and there was a blue look round his lips.

"Two thousand pounds."

"Let me have the bill to-morrow at latest. It shall be cleared. Now don't keep me."

He strode past her and went up to where Lord Grayleigh was waiting for him.

"This is good," said the nobleman. "I am very sorry I could not come to town. Yes, my ankle is better, but I dare not use it. I am limping, as you see."

"Shall we go into the house?" said Ogilvie; "I want to get this thing over. I have not a moment if I am to start on Saturday."

"You must do what we want. The public are impatient. We must get your report as soon as possible. You will wire it to us, of course?"

"That depends."

"Now listen, Ogilvie," said Lord Grayleigh, as they both entered the study of the latter and Ogilvie sank into a chair, "you either do this thing properly or you decline it, you give it up."

"Can I? I thought the die was cast?"

"The worldly man in me echoes that hope, but I *could* get Atherton to take your place even now."

"Even now?" echoed Philip Ogilvie.

"Even now it may be possible to manage it, although I"—Lord Grayleigh had a flashing memory of Sibyl's face and the look in her eyes, when she spoke of her perfect father. Then he glanced at the man who, silent and with suppressed suffering in his face, stood before him. The irresolution in Ogilvie's face took something from its character, and seemed to lower the man's whole nature. Lord Grayleigh shivered; then the uncomfortable sensation which the memory of Sibyl gave him passed away.

"I shall regret it extremely if you cannot do what I want," he said, with emphasis.

Ogilvie had a quick sensation of momentary relief. His wife owed another two thousand pounds. It would be bankruptcy, ruin, if he did not go. He stood up.

"The time for discussing the thing is over," he said. "I will go—and—do *as you wish*. The only thing to put straight is the price down."

"What do you mean by the price down?"

"I want money."

"Of course, you shall have it."

"I want more than my expenses, and something to cover the loss to my business which my absence may create."

"How much more?" Lord Grayleigh looked at him anxiously.

"Ten thousand pounds in cash now, to be placed to my credit in my bank."

"Ten thousand pounds in cash! That is a big order."

"Not too big for what you require me to do. You make hundreds of thousands by me eventually; what is one ten thousand? It will relieve my mind and set a certain matter straight. The fact is—I will confide in you so far—my own pecuniary affairs are anything but flourishing. I have had some calls to meet. What little property I own is settled on my wife. You know that a man cannot interfere with his marriage settlements. I have one child. I want to make a special provision for her."

"I know your child," said Lord Grayleigh, in a very grave tone; "she is out of the common."

A spasm of pain crossed the father's face.

"She is," he answered slowly. "I wish to make a provision for her. If I die (I may die, we are all mortal; I am going to a distant place; possibilities in favour of death are ten per cent. greater than if I remain at home)—if I die, this will be hers. It will comfort me, and make it absolutely impossible for me to go back. You understand that sometimes a miserable starved voice within me speaks. I allude to the voice of conscience. However much it clamours, I cannot listen to it when that sum of money lies in the bank to my credit, with my last will and testament leaving it eventually to my little daughter."

"I would not give your daughter such a portion, if I were you," thought Lord Grayleigh, but he did not say the words aloud. He said instead, "What you wish shall be done."

The two men talked a little longer together. Certain necessary arrangements were concluded, and Ogilvie bore in his pocket before he left a cheque for ten thousand pounds on Lord Grayleigh's private acount.

"This clinches matters," he said, and he gave a significant glance at Grayleigh.

"You will see Spielmann for all the rest," was Grayleigh's answer; "and now, if you must catch the train—"

"Yes, I must; good-bye."

Lord Grayleigh walked with him as far as the porch.

"Have you seen your wife?" he asked. "Can we not induce you to wait for the next train and stay to lunch?"

"No, thanks, it is impossible. Oh, I see you have sent for the dog-cart; I will drive to the station."

Just then Sibyl, Gus, and Freda appeared in view. Sibyl was extremely dirty. She had been climbing trees to good effect that morning, and there was a rent in front of her dress and even a very apparent hole in one of her stockings. She and Gus were arguing somewhat fiercely, and the cap she wore was pushed back, and her golden hair was all in a tangle. Suddenly she raised her eyes, caught sight of her father, and, with a shout something between a whoop and a cry, flung herself into his arms.

"Daddy, daddy!" she cried.

He clasped her tightly to his breast. He did not notice the shabby dress nor the torn stocking; he only saw the eager little face, the eyes brimful with love; he only felt the beating of the warm, warm heart.

"Why, dad, now I shall be happy. Where are you, Gus? Gus, this is father; Gus, come here!"

But at a nod from Lord Grayleigh both Gus and Freda had vanished round the corner.

"I will say good-bye, if you must go, Ogilvie," said Grayleigh. He took his hand, gave it a sympathetic squeeze, and went into the house.

"But must you go, father? Why, you have only just come," said Sibyl.

"I must, my darling, I must catch the next train; there is not ten minutes. Jump on the dog-cart, we will drive to the station together."

"Oh, 'licious!" cried Sibyl, "more than 'licious; but what will mother say?"

"Never mind, the coachman will bring you back. Jump up, quick."

In another instant Sibyl was seated between her father and the coachman. The spirited mare dashed forward, and they bowled down the avenue. Ogilvie's arm was tight round Sibyl's waist, he was hugging her to him, squeezing her almost painfully tight. She gasped a little, drew in her breath, and then resolved to bear it.

"There's something troubling him, he likes having me near him," thought the child. "I wouldn't let him see that he's squeezing me up a bit too tight for all the world."

The mare seemed to fly over the ground. Ogilvie was glad.

"We shall have a minute or two at the station, I can speak to her then," he thought. "I won't tell her that I am going, but I can say something." Then the station appeared in view, and the mare was pulled up with a jerk; Ogilvie jumped to his feet, and lifted Sibyl to the ground.

"Wait for the child," he said to the servant, "and take her back carefully to the house."

"Yes, sir," answered the man, touching his hat.

Ogilvie went into the little station, and Sibyl accompanied him.

"I have my ticket," he said, "we have three minutes to spare, three whole precious minutes."

"Three whole precious minutes," repeated Sibyl. "What is it, father?"

"I am thinking of something," he said.

"What?" asked the girl.

"For these three minutes, one hundred and eighty seconds, you and I are to all intents and purposes alone in the world."

"Father! why, so we are," she cried. "Mother's not here, we are all alone. Nothing matters, does it, when we are alone together?"

"Nothing."

"You don't look quite well, dear father."

"I have been having some suffering lately, and am worried about things, those sort of things that don't come to little girls."

"Of course they don't, father, but when I'm a woman I'll have them. I'll take them instead of you."

"Now listen, my darling."

"Father, before you speak . . . I know you are going to say something very, *very* solemn; I know you when you're in your solemn moments; I like you best of all then. You seem like Jesus Christ then. Don't you feel like Jesus Christ, father?"

"Never, Sib, never; but the time is going by, the train is signalled. My dearest, what is it?"

"Mayn't I go back to town with you? I like the country, I like Gus and Freda and Mabel, but there is no place like your study in the evening, and there's no place like my bedroom at night when you come into it. I'd like to go back with you, wouldn't it be fun! Couldn't you take me?"

"I could, of course," said the man, and just for a moment he wavered. It would be nice to have her in the house, all by herself, for the next two or three days, but he put the thought from him as if it were a temptation.

"No, Sib," he said, "you must go back to your mother; it would not be at all right to leave your mother alone."

"Of course not," she answered promptly, and she gave a sigh which was scarcely a sigh.

"It would have been nice all the same," said Ogilvie. "Ah! there is my train; kiss me, darling."

She flung her arms tightly round his neck.

"Sibyl, just promise before I leave you that you will be a good girl, that you will make goodness the first thing in life. If, for instance, we were never to meet again—of course we shall, thousands of times, but just suppose, for the sake of saying it, that we did not, I should like to know that my little girl put goodness first. There is nothing else worth the while in life. Cling on to it, Sibyl, cling tight hold to it. Never forget that I—"

"Yes, father, I will cling to it. Yes, father?"

"That I wish it. You would do a great deal for me?"

"For you and Lord Jesus Christ," she answered softly.

"Then I wish this, remember, and whatever happens, whatever you hear, remember you promised. Now here's my train, stand back. Good-bye, little woman, good-bye."

"I'll see you again very, very soon, father?"

"Very soon," answered the man. He jumped into the carriage, the train puffed out of the station. A porter came up to Sibyl and spoke to her.

"Anybody come to meet you, Miss?"

"No, thank you," she answered with dignity; "I was seeing my father off to town; there's my twap waiting outside."

The man smiled, and the little girl went gravely out of the station.

Sibyl went back to Lord Grayleigh's feeling perplexed. There was an expression about her father's face which puzzled her.

"He ought to have me at home with him," she thought. "I have seen him like this now and then, and he's mostly not well. He's beautiful when he talks as he did to-day, but he's mostly not well when he does it. I 'spect he's nearer Lord Jesus when he's not well, that must be it. My most perfect father wants me to be good;

I don't want to be good a bit, but I must, to please him."

Just then a somewhat shrill and petulant voice called the child.

"My dear Sibyl, where *have* you been? What are you doing on the dog-cart? How unladylike! Jump down this minute."

The man pulled up the mare, and Sibyl jumped to the ground. She met her mother's somewhat angry face with a smile which she tried hard to make sweet.

"I didn't do anything naughty, really, Mummy," she said. "Father took me to the station to say good-bye. He's off back to town, and he took me with him, and I came back on the twap."

"Don't say twap, sound your 'r'—trap."

"Tw-rap," struggled Sibyl over the difficult word.

"And now you are to go into the house and ask Nurse to put on your very best dress. I am going to take you to a garden party, immediately after lunch. Mr. Rochester and Lady Helen Douglas are coming with us. Be quick."

"Oh, 'licious!" said Sibyl. She rushed into the house, and up to her nursery. Nurse was there waiting to deck her in silk and lace and feathers. The little girl submitted to her toilet, and now took a vast interest in it.

"You must make me quite my prettiest self," she said to the nurse; "you must do your very best, 'cos mother—"

"What about your mother now, Missy?"

"'Cos mother's just a little—Oh, nothing," said Sibyl, pulling herself up short.

"She likes me best when I'm pretty," continued the child; "but father likes me always. Nursie, do you know that my ownest father came down here to-day, and that I dwove to the station to see him off. Did you know it?"

"No, Miss Sibyl, I can't say I did."

"He talked to me in a most pwivate way," continued Sibyl. "He told me most 'portant things, and I promised him, Nursie—I promised him that I'd—. Oh, no! I won't tell you. Perhaps I won't be able to keep my promise, and then you'd—. Nothing, Nursie, nothing; don't be 'quisitive. I can see in your face that you are all bursting with 'quisitiveness; but you aren't to know. I am going to a party with my own mother after lunch, and Lady Helen is coming, and Mr. Rochester. I like them both very much indeed. Lady Helen told me stories last night. She put her arm round my waist, and she talked to me; and I told her some things, too, and she laughed."

"What did you tell her, Miss Sibyl?"

"About my father and mother. She laughed quite funnily. I wish people wouldn't; it shows how little they know. It's 'cos they are so far from being perfect that they don't understand perfect people. But there's the lunch gong. Yes, I do look very nice. Good-bye, Nursie!"

Sibyl ran down stairs. The children always appeared at this meal, and she took her accustomed place at the table. Very soon afterwards, she, her mother, Lady Helen, and Mr. Rochester, started for a place about ten miles off, where an afternoon reception was being given.

Sibyl felt inclined to be talkative, and Mrs. Ogilvie, partly because she had a sore feeling in her heart with regard to her husband's departure, although she would not acknowledge it, was inclined to be snappish. She pulled the little girl up several times, and at last Sibyl subsided in her seat, and looked out straight before her. It was then that Lady Helen once more put her arm round her waist.

"Presently," said Lady Helen, "when the guests are all engaged, you and I will slip out by ourselves, and I will show you one of the most beautiful views in all England; we climb a winding path, and we suddenly come out quite above all the trees, and we look around us; and when we get there, you'll be able to see the blue sea in the distance, and the ships, one of which is going to take your—"

But just then Mrs. Ogilvie gave Helen Douglas so severe a push with her foot, that she stopped, and got very red.

"What ship do you mean?" said Sibyl, surprised at the sudden break in the conversation, and now intensely interested, "the ship that is going to take my—my what?"

"Did you never hear the old saying, that you must wait until your ship comes home?" interrupted Mr. Rochester, smiling at the child, and looking at Lady Helen, who had not got over her start and confusion.

"But this ship was going out," said Sibyl. "Never mind, I 'spect it's a secret; there's lots of 'em floating round to-day. I've got some 'portant ones of my own. Never mind, Lady Helen, don't blush no more." She patted Lady Helen in a patronising way on her hand, and the whole party laughed; the tension was, for the time, removed.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ogilvie made a will leaving the ten thousand pounds which Lord Grayleigh had given him absolutely to Sibyl for her sole use and benefit. He also made all other preparations for his absence from home, and started for Queensland on Saturday. He wrote to his wife on the night before he left England, repeating his injunction that on no account was Sibyl to be yet told of his departure.

" When she absolutely must learn it, break it to her in the tenderest way possible," he said; " but as Grayleigh has kindly invited you both to stay on at Grayleigh Manor for another week, you may as well do so, and while there I want the child to be happy. The country air and the companionship of other children are doing her a great deal of good. I never saw her look better than I did the other day. I should also be extremely glad, Mildred, if on your return to town you would arrange to send Sibyl to a nice day-school, where she could have companions. I have nothing to say against Miss Winstead, but I think the child would be better, less old-fashioned, and might place us more on the pedestal which we really ought to occupy, if she had other children to talk to and exchange thoughts with. Try to act, my dear wife, as I would like in this particular, I beg of you. Also when you have to let my darling know that I am away, you will find a letter for her in my left-hand top drawer in my study table. Give it to her, and do not ask to see it. It is just a little private communication from her father, and for her eyes alone. Be sure, also, you tell her that, all being well, I hope to be back in England by the end of the summer."

Ogilvie added some more words to his letter, and Mrs. Ogilvie received it on Saturday morning. She read it over carelessly, and then turned to Jim Rochester who stood near. During her visit to Grayleigh Manor she had got to know this young man very well, and to like him extremely. He was good-looking, pleasant to talk to, well-informed, and with genial, hearty views of life. He had been well brought up, and his principles were firm and unshaken. His notion of living was to do right on every possible occasion, to turn from the wrong with horror, to have faith in God, to keep religion well in view, and as far as in him lay to love his neighbour better than himself.

Rochester, it may be frankly stated, had some time ago lost his heart to Lady Helen Douglas, who, on her part, to all appearance returned his affection. Nothing had yet, however, been said between the pair, although Rochester's eyes proclaimed his secret whenever they rested on Lady Helen's fair face.

He watched Mrs. Ogilvie now with a sudden interest as she folded up her husband's letter.

"Well," she said, turning to him and uttering a quick sigh; "he is off, it is a *fait accompli.* Do you know, I am relieved."

"Are you?" he answered. He looked at her almost wistfully. He himself was sorry for Ogilvie, he did not know why. He was, of course, aware that he was going to Queensland to assay the Lombard Deeps, for the talk of this great new gold mine had already reached his ears. He knew that Ogilvie, moreover, looked pale, ill at ease, and worried. He supposed that this uneasiness and want of alacrity in carrying a very pleasurable business to a successful issue was caused by the man's great attachment to his wife and child. Mrs. Ogilvie must also be sorry when she remembered that it would be many months before she saw him again. But there was no sorrow now in the soft eyes which met his, nothing but a look of distinct annoyance.

"Really," she said with an impatient movement, "I must confide in someone, and why not in you, Mr. Rochester, as well as another? I have already told you that my husband is absolutely silly about that child. From her birth he has done all that man could do to spoil her."

"But without succeeding," interrupted Jim Rochester. "I am quite friendly with your little Sibyl now," he added, "and I never saw a nicer little girl."

"Oh, that is what strangers always say," replied Mrs. Ogilvie, shrugging her shoulders, "and the child is nice, I am not denying it for a moment, but she would be nicer if she were not simply ruined. He wants her to live in an impossible world, without any contradictions or even the smallest pain. You will scarcely believe it, but he would not allow me, the other day, to tell her such a very simple, ordinary thing as that he was going to Queensland on business, and now, in his letter, he still begs of me to keep it a secret from her. She is not to know anything about his absence until she returns to London, because, forsooth, the extra week she is to spend in the country would not do her so much good if she were fretting. Why should Sibyl fret? Surely it is not worse for her than for me; not nearly as bad, for that matter."

"I am glad you feel it," said Rochester.

"Feel it? What a strange remark! Did you think I was heartless? Of course I feel it, but I am not going to be silly or sentimental over the matter. Philip is a very lucky man to have this business to do. I would not be so foolish as to keep him at home; but he is ruining that child, ruining her. She gets more spoilt and intolerable every day."

"Forgive me, Mrs. Ogilvie," said Lady Helen, who came upon the scene at that moment, "I heard you talking of your little daughter. I don't think I ever met a sweeter child."

Mrs. Ogilvie threw up her hands in protest.

"There you go," she said. "Mr. Rochester has been saying almost the very same words, Lady Helen. Now, let me tell you that Sibyl is not your child; no one can be more charming to strangers."

As Mrs. Ogilvie spoke she walked a few steps away; then she turned and resumed her conversation.

"The annoying part of this letter," she said, "is that Philip has written a private communication to Sibyl, and when she hears of his absence she is to be given his letter, and I am not even to see it. I don't think I shall give it to her; I really must now take the management of the child into my own hands. Her father will be absent—oh! there you are, Sibyl. What are you doing, loitering about near windows? Why don't you play with your companions?" For

Sibyl had burst in by the open window looking breathless.

"I thought—I thought," she began; "I thought, mother, that I heard you—" her face was strangely white, and her wide-open eyes looked almost wild in expression.

"It's not true, of course; but I thought I heard you say something about father, and a—a letter I was to have in his absence. Did you say it, mother?"

"I said nothing of the sort," replied Mrs. Ogilvie, flushing red, and almost pushing Sibyl from the room, "nothing of the sort; go and play."

Sibyl gave her an earnest and very penetrating look. She did not glance either at Mr. Rochester or Lady Helen.

"It's wicked for good people to tell lies, isn't it?" she said then, slowly.

"Wicked," cried her mother; "it's shamefully wicked."

"And you are good, mother, you don't ever tell lies; I believe you, mother, of course." She turned and went out of the room. As she went slowly in the direction of the field where the other children were taking turns to ride bareback one of the horses, her thoughts were very puzzled.

"I wish things would be 'splained to me," she said, half aloud, and she pushed back her curls from her forehead. "There are more and more things every day want 'splaining. I certainly did hear her say it. I heard them all talking, and Lady Helen said something, and Mr. Rochester said something, and mother said that father wished me not to know, and I was to have a letter, and then mother said 'in his absence.' Oh, what can it mean?"

The other children shouted to her from the field, but she was in no mood to join them, and just then Lord Grayleigh, who was pacing up and down his favourite walk, called her to his side.

"What a puzzled expression you are wearing, my little girl," he said. "Is anything the matter?"

Sibyl skipped up to him. Some of the cloud left her face. Perhaps he could put things straight for her.

"I want to ask you a question," she said.

"You are always asking questions. Now ask me something really nice; but first, I have something to say. I am in a very giving mood this morning. Sometimes I am in a saving mood, and would not give so much as a brass farthing to anybody, but I am in the other sort of mood to-day. I am in the mood to give a little golden-haired girl called—"

"Sibyl," said the child, beginning to laugh; "if she is golden-haired it must be me. What is it you want to give me?"

Her attention was immediately arrested; her eyes shone and her lips smiled.

"What would you like best in the world?"

"Oh, best in the whole world? But I cannot have that, not for a week—we are going home this day week."

"And what will you have when you go home?"

"Father's kiss every night. He always comes up, Lord Grayleigh, and tucks me in bed, and he kisses me, and we have a cosy talk. He never misses, never, when he is at home. I am lonesome here, Lord Grayleigh, because mother does not think it good for me that she should come; she would if she thought it good for me."

"Well," said Lord Grayleigh, who for some reason did not feel quite comfortable as Sibyl talked of her father's kisses, "we must find something for you, not quite the best thing of all. What would be the next best?"

"I know," said Sibyl, laughing, "a Shetland pony; oh, I do want one so badly. Mother sometimes rides in the Park, and I do so long to go with her, but she said we couldn't afford it. Oh, I do want a pony."

"You shall have one," said Lord Grayleigh; "it shall be my present to a very good, charming little girl."

"Do you really think I am good?"

"Good? Excellent; you are a pattern to us all."

"Wouldn't father like to hear you. It's wonderful how he talked to me about being good. I am not really good, you know; but I mean to try. If you were to look into my heart, you would see—oh, but you shan't look." She started back, clasped her hands, and laughed. "But when father looks next, he shall see, oh, a white heart with all the naughtiness gone."

"Tell me exactly what sort of pony you would like," said Lord Grayleigh, who thought it desirable to turn the conversation.

"It must have a long mane, and not too short a tail," said Sibyl; "and be sure you give me the very nicest, newest sort of side-saddle, same as mother has herself, for mother's side-saddle is very comfy. Oh, and I'd like a riding habit like mother's too. Mother will be sure to say she can't-'ford one for me, but you'll give me one if you give me the pony and the side-saddle, won't you?"

"I'll give you the pony and the side-saddle, and the habit," said Lord Grayleigh. "I'll choose the pony to-morrow, and bring him back with me. I am going to Lyndhurst, in the New Forest, where they are going to have a big horse fair. You will not mind having a New Forest pony instead of a Shetland?"

"I don't mind what sort my darling pony is," answered the child. "I only want to have it. Oh, you are nice. I began by not liking you, but I like you awfully now. You are very nice, indeed."

"And so are you. It seems to me we suit each other admirably."

"There are lots of nice people in the world," said Sibyl; "it's a very pleasant place. There are two quite perfect, and there are others very nice; you and Mr. Rochester and Lady Helen. But, oh, Lord Grayleigh, I know now what I wanted to say. A perfect person couldn't never tell a lie, could she?"

"Oh, it's the feminine gender," said Lord Grayleigh softly, under his breath.

"It's a she," said Sibyl; "could she: could she?"

"A perfect person could not, little girl."

"Now you have made me so happy that I am going to kiss you," said Sibyl. She made a spring forward, flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him twice on his rough cheek. The next instant she had vanished out of sight and joined her companions.

"It's all right," she said to Gus, who looked at her in some amazement. "It's all right; I got a fright, but there wasn't a word of it true.

Come, let's play. Oh! do you know your father is going to give me a pony? I am so happy!"

In a week's time Mrs. Ogilvie and Sibyl returned to town. Sibyl was intensely joyful on this occasion, and confided in everyone what a happy night she would have.

"You don't know what father is," she said, looking full up into Rochester's eyes. He was standing on the terrace, and the little girl went and stood by his side. Sibyl was in her most confiding mood. She considered Lord Grayleigh, Mr. Rochester, Lady Helen, and the children were all her special friends. It was impossible to doubt their entire sympathy and absolute ability to rejoice in her joy.

"I have had a good time here," she said, "very good. Lord Grayleigh has been nice; I began by not liking him, but I like him now, and I like you awfully, but after all there's no place for me like my own, own home. It's 'cos of father."

"Yes!" said Rochester. He looked anxiously, as Sibyl spoke, towards the house. Everyone at Grayleigh Manor now knew that Sibyl was not to be told of her father's absence during her visit. No one approved of this course, although no one felt quite towards it with the same sense of irritation that Mrs. Ogilvie herself did. Rochester wished at this instant that Lord Grayleigh or someone else would appear. He wanted anything to cause a diversion, but Sibyl, in happy ignorance of his sentiments talked on.

"It is at night that my father is the most perfect of all," she said. "I wish you could see him when he comes into my room. I am in bed, you know, lying down flat on my back, and mostly thinking about the angels. I do that a lot at night, I have no time in the day; I think of the angels, and Lord Jesus Christ, and heaven, and then father comes in. He opens the door soft, and he treads on tiptoe for fear I'm asleep, as if I could be! And then he kisses me, and I think in the whole of heaven there can never be an angel so good and beautiful as he is, and he says something to me which keeps me strong until the next night, when he says something else."

"But your mother?" stammered Rochester. He was about to add, "She would go to your room, would she not?" when he remembered that she herself had told him that nothing would induce her to adopt so pernicious a course.

"Oh, you're thinking about my perfect mother too," said Sibyl. "Yes, she is perfect, but there are different sorts in the world. My own mother thinks it is not good for me to lie awake at night and think of the angels and wait for father. She thinks that I ought to bear the yoke in my youth.

Solomon, the wise King Solomon—you've heard of him, haven't you?"

Rochester nodded.

"He wrote that verse about bearing the yoke when you are young. I learnt it a week ago, and I felt it just 'splained about my mother. It's really very brave of mother; but, you see, father thinks different, and, of course, I nat'rally like father's way best. Mother's way is the goodest for me, p'waps. Don't you think mother's way is the goodest for me, Mr. Rochester?"

"I dare say it is good for you, Sibyl. Now, shall we go and find Lady Helen?"

"Seems to me," said Sibyl, "I'm always looking for Lady Helen when I'm with you. Is it 'cos you're so desperate fond of her?"

"Don't you like her yourself?" said the young man, reddening visibly.

"Like her? I like her just awfully. She's the most 'licious person to tell stories I ever comed across in all my borned days. She tells every sort of story about giants and fairies and adventures, and stories of little girls just like me. Does she tell you stories about men just like you, and is that why you like to be with her?"

"Well, I can't honestly say that she has ever yet told me a story, but I will ask her to do so."

"Do," said Sibyl; "ask her to tell you a story about a man like yourself. Make him rather pwoper and stiff and shy, and let him blush sometimes. You do, you know you do. Maybe it will do you good to hear about him. Now come along and let's find her."

So Sibyl and Rochester hunted all over the place for Lady Helen, and when they found her not, for she had gone to the nearest village on a commission with one of the children, Rochester's face looked somewhat grave, and his answers to the child were a little *distrait*. Sibyl said to him in a tone of absolute sympathy and good faith—

"Cheer up, won't you? She is quite certain to marry you in the long run."

"Don't talk like that," said Rochester in a voice of pain.

"Don't what? You do want to marry Lady Helen, I heard mother say so yesterday. I heard her say so to Hortense. Hortense was brushing her hair, and mother said, 'It would be a good match on the whole for Lady Helen, 'cause she is as poor as a church mouse, and Jim Rochester has money.' Is my darling Lady Helen as poor as a church mouse, and have you lots of money, Mr. Rochester?"

"I have money, but not lots. You ought not to repeat what you hear," said the young man.

"But why? I thought everybody knew.

You are always trying to make her marry you, I see it in your eyes; you don't know how you look when you look at her, oh—ever so eager, same as I look when father's in the room and he is not talking to me. I hope you will marry her, more especial if she's as poor as a church mouse. I never knew why mice were poor, nor why mother said it, but she did. Oh, and there is mother, I must fly to her: good-bye—good-bye."

Rochester concealed his feelings as best he could, and hurried immediately into a distant part of the grounds, where he cogitated over what Sibyl, in her childish way, had revealed.

The pony had been purchased, and Sibyl had ridden it once. It was a bright bay with a white star on its forehead. It was a well-groomed, well-trained little animal, and Lord Grayleigh had given Sibyl her first riding lesson, and had shown her how to hold the reins, and how to sit on her saddle, and the riding habit had come from town, and the saddle was the newest and most comfortable that money could buy.

"It is my present to you," said Lord Grayleigh, "and remember when you ride it that you are going to be a good girl."

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Sibyl, "I don't want *everyone* to tell me that I am to be a good girl.

If it was father; but—don't please, Lord Grayleigh; I'll do a badness if you talk to me any more about being so good."

"Well, I won't," said Lord Grayleigh, laughing.

"I 'spect father will write you a most loving letter about this," said Sibyl. "Won't he be 'sprised? And did you tell mother about me having a ride every morning?"

"I did."

"And did you speak to her about the food for my pony all being paid for?"

"Yes, everything is arranged. Your pony shall be the best cared for in all London, and you shall ride him every day for half-an-hour before you go to school."

"Oh, I never go to school," said Sibyl in a sorrowful voice. "I have a Miss Winstead to teach me. She is the sort that—oh, well, no matter; she means all right, poor thing. She wants the money, so of course she has to stay. She doesn't suit me a bit, but she wants the money. It's all right, isn't it?"

"So it seems, little girl; and now here is the carriage, and the pony has gone off to London already, and will be ready to take you on his back to-morrow morning. Be sure you think of a nice name for him."

"Father will tell me a name. I won't let anybody else christen my ownest pony. Good-bye, Lord Grayleigh, I like you very much. Say good-bye to Mr. Rochester for me—oh, and there is Lady Helen; good-bye, Lady Helen—good-bye."

They all kissed Sibyl when they parted from her, and everyone was sorry at seeing the last of her bright little face, and many conjectures went forth with regard to the trouble which was before the child when she got to London. One and all thought that Ogilvie had behaved cruelly, and that his wife was somewhat silly to have yielded to him.

Sibyl went up to town in the highest spirits. She chatted so much on the road that her mother at last told her to hold her tongue.

"Sit back in your seat and don't chatter," she said, "you disturb other people."

The other people in the carriage consisted of a very old gentleman and a small boy of Sibyl's own age. The small boy smiled at Sibyl and she smiled back, and if her mother had permitted it would have chatted to him in a moment of her hopes and longings; but, when mother puts on that look, Sibyl knew that she must restrain her emotions, and she sat back in her seat, and thought about the children who bore the yoke in their youth, and how good it was for them, and how rapidly she was growing into the sort of little girl her father most liked.

"Mother," she said, as they got towards the end of the journey, "I'm 'proving, aren't I?"

"Proving, what do you mean?"

"*Im*proving, mother."

"I can't say that I see it, Sibyl; you have been very troublesome for the last few days."

"Oh!" said the child, "oh!"

Sibyl changed seats from the one opposite, and nestled up close to her mother, she tucked her hand inside her arm, and then began to talk in a loud buzzing whisper.

"It's 'cos of father," she said; "he begged me so earnest to be a good girl, and I *have* tried, *haven't* you noticed it, mother? Won't you tell him when we get home that I have tried?"

"Don't worry me, Sibyl, you know my views. I want you to be just a sensible, good child, without any of those high-flown notions. When we return to town you must make up for your long holiday. You must do your lessons with extreme care, and try to please Miss Winstead."

"And to please father and Lord Jesus?"

"Yes, yes, child."

"And to have a ride every morning on my darling pony?"

"We will try and manage that. Lord Grayleigh has been almost silly over that pony; I doubt whether it is wise for you to have it."

"Oh, mother, he did say he would buy everything—the pony, the saddle, the habit, and he would 'ford the food, too. You have not got to pay out any money, mother, have you?"

"Hush! don't talk so loud."

The old gentleman buried himself in *The Times* in order not to hear Sibyl's distressed voice, and the little boy stared out of the window and got very red.

"Take up your book and stop talking," said Mrs. Ogilvie.

Sibyl took up a book which she already knew by heart, and kept back a sorrowful sigh.

"But it don't matter," she said to herself; "when I see father, he'll understand."

They got to town, where a carriage was waiting for them. Sibyl could scarcely restrain her eagerness.

"Mother, may I ask John if father's likely to be at home? Sometimes he comes home earlier than usual. Pwaps he came home to lunch and is waiting for us. Can I call out to John through the window, mother?"

"No, sit still, you do fidget so."

"I'll try to be quiet, mother; it's only 'cos I'm so incited."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Ogilvie to herself, "what an awful evening I am likely to have! When the silly child really finds out that her father has gone, she will burst into hysterics, or do something else absurd. I really wish it had been my luck to marry a husband with a grain of sense. I wonder if I had better tell her now. No, I really cannot. Miss Winstead must do it. Miss Winstead has been having a nice holiday, with no fuss or worry of any sort, and it is quite fair that she should bear the burden of this. But why it should be regarded as a burden or a trial is a puzzle. Philip goes on a sort of pleasure expedition to Queensland, and the affair is treated almost as if—as if it were a death. It is positively uncanny."

Sibyl noticed that her mother was silent, and that she looked worried. Presently she stretched out her hand and stroked her mother's.

"What are you doing that for?"

"'Cos I thought I'd rub you the right way," said Sibyl. "You are like a poor cat when it is rubbed the wrong way, aren't you, just now, mother?"

"Don't be so ridiculous." Mrs. Ogilvie snatched her hand away.

They soon reached the house. The footman, Watson, sprang down and lowered the steps. Sibyl bounded out and flew into the hall.

"Father! Father!" she called. "I'm back.

Are you in, father? Here I are—Sibyl. I'm home again, father. The Angel is home again, father."

She did not often call herself the Angel, the name seemed to have more or less slipped out of sight, but she did on this occasion, and she threw back her pretty head and looked up the wide staircase, as if any moment she might see her father hurrying down to meet her.

Mrs. Ogilvie turned to one of the servants, who was watching the child in astonishment.

"She does not know yet," whispered Mrs. Ogilvie. "I am going into the library; don't tell her anything, pray, but send Miss Winstead to me immediately."

Mrs. Ogilvie entered the library. Sibyl danced in after her.

"I can't see father anywhere," she said; "I 'spect he's not back yet."

"Of course he is not back so early. Now run upstairs and ask Nurse to make you ready for tea. Leave me, I have something to say to Miss Winstead."

Miss Winstead appeared at that moment. She had enjoyed her holiday, and looked the better for it. Though she understood Sibyl very little, yet at this moment she gazed at the child almost with alarm, for Mrs. Ogilvie had written to her telling her that Mr. Ogilvie's absence had not been alluded to in the child's presence.

Sibyl rushed to her and kissed her.

" I am back, and I am going to be good," she said. " I really, truly am; aren't you glad to see me? "

" Yes, Sibyl."

" Go upstairs now, Sibyl," said her mother. Sibyl obeyed somewhat unwillingly, some of the laughter went out of her eyes, and a little of the excitement faded from her heart. She went up the wide stairs slowly, very slowly. Even now she hoped that it might be possible for her father to appear, turning the angle of the winding stairs, coming out of one of the rooms. He always had such a bright face, there was an eagerness about it. He was tall and rather slender, and that bright look in his eyes always caused the child's heart to leap; then his mouth could wear such a beautiful smile. It did not smile for many people, but it always did for Sibyl. She wanted to see him, oh, so badly, so badly.

" Well, never mind," she said to herself, " he can't help it, the darling; but he'll be back soon," and she tripped into her nursery and sat down; but she did not ask Nurse any questions, she was too busy with her own thoughts.

CHAPTER IX.

"Miss Winstead," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "this is all most unpleasant."

"What do you mean?" asked the governess.

"Why, this whim of my husband's. He has been away for over a week, and the child imagines that he is still in London, that he will return at any instant and spoil her, after his usual injudicious fashion."

"Oh, I don't quite think that Mr. Ogilvie spoils your little Sibyl," said Miss Winstead; "he has peculiar ideas, that's all."

"We need not discuss that point," said Mrs. Ogilvie in an irritated tone. "We are back later than I thought, and I have to dine out to-night. I want you, Miss Winstead, to break the tidings to the child that her father has gone to Queensland."

"I?" said Miss Winstead; "I would really rather—"

"I fear your likes or dislikes with regard to the matter cannot be considered. I cannot tell her, because I should not do it properly; and also, a more serious reason, I really have not the time.

You can give Sibyl a treat, if you like, afterwards. Take her out for a walk in the Park after tea, she always likes that; and you can take her to a shop and buy her a new toy—any toy she fancies. Here's a sovereign; you can go as far as that, you ought to get her something quite handsome for that; and you might ask the little Leicesters next door to come to tea to-morrow. There are a hundred ways in which the mind of a child can be diverted."

"Not the mind of Sibyl with regard to her father," interrupted Miss Winstead.

"Well, for goodness' sake, don't make too much of it. You know how peculiar he is, and how peculiar she is. Just tell her that he has gone away for a couple of months—that he has gone on an expedition which means money, and that *I* am pleased about it, that he has done it for my sake and for her sake. Tell her he'll be back before the summer is over. You can put it any way you like, only do it, Miss Winstead—do it!"

"When?" asked Miss Winstead. She turned very pale, and leant one hand on the table.

"Oh, when you please, only don't worry me. You had better take her off my hands at once. Just tell her that I am tired and have a headache, and won't see her until the morning; I really must lie down, and Hortense must bathe my forehead. If I don't I shall look a perfect wreck to-night, and it is going to be a big dinner; I have been anxious for some time to go. And afterwards there is a reception at the Chinese Embassy; I am going there also. Please ask Watson, on your way through the hall, to have tea sent to my boudoir. And now you quite understand?"

"But, please, say exactly what I am to tell your little girl."

"Don't you know? Say that her father has gone—oh, by the way, there's a letter for her. I really don't know that she ought to have it. Her father is sure to have said something terribly injudicious, but perhaps you had better give it to her. You might give it to her when you are telling her, and tell her to read it by-and-by, and not to be silly, but to be sensible. That is my message to her. Now pray go, Miss Winstead. Are you better? Have you had a nice time while we were away?"

"I still suffer very badly with my head," said Miss Winstead, "but the quiet has done me good. Yes, I will try and do my best. I saw Mr. Ogilvie the day he left; he did not look well, and seemed sorrowful. He asked me to be kind to Sibyl."

"I sincerely trust you are kind to the child; if I thought you did not treat her with sympathy and understanding I should be obliged—"

"Oh, you need not go on," said Miss Winstead, colouring, and looking annoyed. "I know my duty. I am not a woman with very large sympathies, or perhaps very wide views, but I try to do my duty; I shall certainly do my utmost for your dear little daughter. There is something very lovable about her, although sometimes I fear I do not quite understand her."

"No one seems to understand Sibyl, and yet everyone thinks her lovable," said the mother. "Well, give her my love; tell her I will ride with her in the morning. She has had a present of a pony, quite a ridiculous present; Lord Grayleigh was determined to give it to her. He took an immense fancy to the child, and put the gift in such a way that it would not have been wise to refuse. Don't forget, when you see Watson, to tell him to bring tea to my boudoir."

Miss Winstead slowly left the room. She was a very quiet woman, about thirty-five years of age. She had a stolid manner, and, as she said herself, was a little narrow and a little old-fashioned, but she was troubled now. She did not like the task set her. As she went upstairs she muttered a solitary word.

"Coward!" she said, under her breath.

"I wish I was well out of this," thought the governess. "The child is not an ordinary one, and the love she bears her father is not an ordinary love."

Miss Winstead's school-room looked its brightest and best. The days were growing quite long now, and flowers were plentiful. A large basket of flowers had been sent from Grayleigh Manor that morning, and Miss Winstead had secured some of the prettiest for her school-room. She had decorated the tea-table and the mantelpiece, but with a pain at her heart, for she was all the time wondering if Sibyl knew or did not know. She could not quite understand from Ogilvie's manner whether she knew or not. He was very reserved about her just at the last, he evidently did not like to talk of her.

Miss Winstead entered the school-room. She sat down for a moment near the open window. The day was still in its prime. She looked at the clock. The under-housemaid, who had the charge of the school-room tea, now came in with the tray. She laid the cloth and spread the tea-things. There was a plate of little queen-cakes for Sibyl.

"Cook made these for Miss Sibyl," she said. "Does she know yet, Miss Winstead, that the master has gone?"

"No," said Miss Winstead; "and I have got to tell her, Anne, and it is a task I anything but like."

"I wouldn't be in your shoes for a deal, Miss," replied Anne, in a sympathetic voice.

Just then a light, childish step was heard in the passage, and Sibyl burst into the room.

"Here I am. Oh, I am so glad tea is ready. What's the hour, please, Miss Winstead? How are you, Anne; is your toothache better?"

"I have not had any toothache to mention since you left, Miss Sibyl."

"I am glad to hear that. You used to suffer awful pain, didn't you? Did you go to Mr. Robbs, the dentist, and did he put your head between his knees and tug and tug to get the tooth out? That's the way Nurse's teeth were taken out when she was a little girl. She told me all about it. Did Mr. Robbs pull your tooth out that way, Anne?"

"No, Miss, the tooth is better and in my head, I'm thankful to say."

"And how is cook? How are her sneezing fits?"

"All the servants are very well, I thank you, Miss."

"Don't make any more enquiries now, Sibyl, sit down and begin your tea," said her governess.

Sibyl made an effort to suppress the words which were bubbling to her lips. Anne had reached the door, when she burst out with—

"I do just want to ask one more question.

How is Watson, Anne, and how is his sweetheart? Has she been kinder to him lately?"

"Sibyl, I refuse to allow you to ask any further questions," interrupted Miss Winstead. She was so nervous and perplexed at the task before her that she was glad even to be able to find fault with the child. It was really reprehensible of any child to take an interest in Watson's sweetheart.

Anne, smiling however, and feeling also inclined to cry, left the room. She ran down to the servants' hall.

"Of all the blessed angel children, Miss Sibyl beats 'em," she cried. "Not one of us has she forgot, dear lamb, even to my tooth and your sneezing fits, cook; and Watson, most special did she inquire for Mary Porter, the girl you're a-keeping company with. It's wonderful what a tender heart she do have."

"That she have truly," said the cook, "and I'll make her some more queen-cakes to-morrow, and ice them for her, that I will. It's but to look at her to see how loving she is," continued the good woman. "How she'll live without the master beats me. The missus ain't worthy of her."

This remark was followed by a sort of groan which proceeded from each servant's mouth. It was evident that Mrs. Ogilvie was not popular in the servants' hall.

Sibyl meanwhile was enjoying her tea.

"It's nearly five o'clock," she said, "father is sure to be in at six, don't you think so, Miss Winstead?"

"He often doesn't come home till seven," answered Miss Winstead in a guilty voice, her hand shaking as she raised the teapot.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Winnie dear," said Sibyl—this was her pet name for the governess; "you have got a sort of palsy, you ought to see a doctor. I asked Nurse what palsy was, and she said 'a shaking,' and you are all shaking. How funny the teapot looks when your hand is bobbing so. Do, Winnie, let me pour out tea."

"Not to-night. I was thinking that after tea you and I might go for a little walk."

"Oh, I couldn't, really, truly; I must wait in till father comes."

"It is such a fine evening, that perhaps—"

"No, no, I don't want to go."

"But your mother has given me money; you are to buy anything you please at the toy-shop."

This was a very great temptation, for Sibyl adored toys.

"How much money?" she asked in a tentative voice.

"Well, a good deal, a whole sovereign."

"Twenty shillings," said Sibyl, "I could get a lovely doll's house for that. But I think sometimes I am getting tired of my dolls. It's so stupid of 'em not to talk, and never to cry, and not to feel pain or love. But, on the whole, I suppose I should like a new doll's house, and there was a beauty at the toy-shop for twenty shillings. It was there at Christmas-time. I expect it's a little dusty now, but I dare say Mr. Holman would let me have it cheap. I am *very* fond of Mr. Holman, aren't you, Winnie? Don't you love him very, very much? He has such kind, sorrowful eyes. Don't you like him?"

"I don't know that I do, Sibyl. Come, finish your tea, my dear."

"Have you been trying to 'prove yourself very much while I was away?" said Sibyl, looking at her now in a puzzled way.

"Prove myself?"

"I can never say that whole word. *Im*prove is what I mean. Have you been trying?"

"I always try, Sibyl."

"Then I think Lord Jesus is helping you, for you *are* proved, you're quite sympathisy. I like you when you're sympathisy. Yes, I have finished my tea, and, if you wish it, I'll go out just as far as Mr. Holman's to buy the doll's house.

He is poor, and he'll be real glad to sell it. He has often told me how little money he makes by the toys, and how they lose their freshness and get dusty, and children toss 'em about and break 'em when they're choosing 'em. Some children are *so* careless. Yes, I'll go with you, and then we'll come straight home. Father will be back certain to-night at six. He'll know that I'll be wanting him."

"Sibyl, I have something to tell you."

"What?"

There was a tremulous note in Miss Winstead's voice which arrested the gay, careless chatter. The child looked at her governess. That deep, comprehensive, strange look visited her eyes. Miss Winstead got up hastily and walked to the window, then she returned to her seat.

"What is it?" said Sibyl, still seated at the tea-table, but turning round and watching her governess.

"It is something that will pain you, dear."

"Oh!" said Sibyl, "go on, please. Out with it! plump it out! as Gus would say. Be quick. I don't like to be kept in 'spense."

"I am afraid, Sibyl, that you will not see your father to-night."

Sibyl jumped up just as if someone had shot her. She stood quite still for a moment, and a shiver went through her little frame; then she went up to Miss Winstead.

"I can bear it," she said; "go on. Shall I see father to-morrow?"

"Not to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the next."

"Go on; I am bearing it," said Sibyl.

She stood absolutely upright, white as a sheet, her eyes queerly dilated, but her lips firm.

"It's a great shock, but I am bearing it," she said again. "*When* will I see him?"

Miss Winstead turned now and looked at her.

"Child," she said, "don't look like that."

"I'm looking no special way; I'm only bearing up. Is father dead?"

"No; no, my dear. No, my poor little darling. Oh, you ought to have been told! but he did not wish it. It was his wish that you should have a happy time in the country. He has gone to Queensland; he will be back in a few months."

"A few months," said Sibyl. "He's not dead?" She sat down listlessly on the window-seat. She heaved a great sigh.

"It's the little shots that hurt most," she said after a pause. "I wouldn't have felt it, if you had said he was dead."

"Come out, Sibyl, you know now he won't be back by six."

"Yes, I'll go out with you."

She turned and walked very gravely out of the room.

"I'd rather she cried and screamed; I'd rather she rushed at me and tried to hurt me; I'd rather she did anything than take it like that," thought the governess.

Sibyl went straight into the nursery.

"Nursie," she said, "my father has gone. He is in Queensland; he did not wish me to be told, but I have been told now. He is coming back in a few months. A few months is like for ever, isn't it, Nursie? I am going out with Miss Winstead for a walk."

"Oh, my darling," said nurse, "this has hurt you horribly."

"Don't," said Sibyl, "don't be sympathisy." She pushed nurse's detaining hand away.

"It's the little shots that tell," she repeated. "I wouldn't have felt anything if it had been a big, big bang; if he had been dead, I mean, but I'm not going to cry, I'm not going to let anybody think that I care anything at all. Give me my hat and gloves and jacket, please, Nurse."

She went to Miss Winstead, put her hand in hers, and the two went donwstairs. When they got into the street Sibyl looked full at her, and asked her one question.

"Was it mother said you was to tell me?"

"Yes."

" Then mother did tell me a—" Sibyl left off abruptly, her poor little face quivered. The suffering in her eyes was so keen that Miss Winstead did not dare to meet them. They went for a walk in the Park, and Sibyl talked in her most proper style, but she did not say any of the nice, queer, interesting things she was, as a rule, noted for. Instead, she told Miss Winstead dry, uninteresting little facts, with regard to her visit to the country.

" I hear you have got a pony," said Miss Winstead.

" I don't want to talk about my pony, please," interrupted Sibyl. " Let me tell you just what were the most perfect views near the place we were in."

" But why may we not talk about your pony? "

" I don't want to ride my pony now."

Miss Winstead was alarmed about the child. " You have walked quite far enough to-night," she said, " you look very white."

" I'm not a scrap tired, I never felt better in my life. Do let us go to the toy-shop."

" A good idea," said the governess, much cheered to find Sibyl, in her opinion, human after all. " We will certainly go there and will choose a beautiful toy."

" Well, this is the turning, come along," said Sibyl.

"But why should we go to Holman's, there is a splendid toy-shop in this street."

"I'd much rather go to Mr. Holman's."

Miss Winstead did not expostulate any further. Presently they reached the shabby little shop. Mr. Holman, the owner of the shop, was a special friend of the child's. He had once or twice, charmed by her sympathetic way, confided some of his griefs to her. He found it, he told her, extremely difficult to make the toy-shop pay; and Sibyl, in consequence, considered it her bounden duty to spend every halfpenny she could spare at this special shop. She entered now, went straight up to the counter and held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Holman," she said; "I hope I find you quite well."

"Thank you, Missy; I am in the enjoyment of good health," replied the shopman, flushing with pleasure and grasping the little hand.

"I am glad of that," answered Sibyl. "I have come, Mr. Holman, to buy a big thing, it will do your shop a lot of good. I am going to spend twenty shillings in your shop. What would you like me to buy?"

"You thought a doll's house," interrupted Miss Winstead, who stood behind the child.

"Oh, it don't matter about that," said Sibyl, looking gravely back at her; "I mean it don't matter now. Mr. Holman, what's the most dusty of your toys, what's the most scratched, what's the toy that none of the other children would like?"

"I have a whole heap of 'em," said Holman, shaking his head sadly.

"That he have, poor dear," here interrupted Mrs. Holman. "How do you do, Missy, we are both glad to see you back again; we have had a dull season, very dull, and the children, they didn't buy half the toys they ought to at Christmas time. It's because our shop is in a back street."

"Oh, but it's a very nice street," said Sibyl; "it's retired, isn't it? Well, I'll buy twenty shillingsworth of the most dusty of the toys, and please send them home to-morrow. Please, Miss Winstead, put the money down."

Miss Winstead laid a sovereign on the counter.

"Good-bye, Mr. Holman; good-bye, Mrs. Holman," said Sibyl. She shook hands solemnly with the old pair, and then went out of the shop.

"What ails her?" said Holman. "She looks as if something had died inside her. I don't like her look a bit."

Mrs. Ogilvie enjoyed herself very much that evening. Her friends were glad to see her back. They were full of just the pleasant sympathy which she liked best to receive. She must be lonely without her husband. When would he return? When she said in a few months' time, they congratulated her, and asked her how she had enjoyed herself at Grayleigh Manor. In short, there was that sort of fuss made about her which most appealed to her fancy. She forgot all about Sibyl. She looked at other women of her acquaintance, and thought that when her husband came home she would wear just as dazzling gems and just as beautiful dresses, and she, too, might talk about her country place, and invite her friends down to this rural retreat at Whitsuntide, and make up a nice house-party in the autumn, and again in the winter. Oh, yes, the world with its fascinations was stealing more and more into her heart, and she had no room for the best of all. She forgot her lonely child during these hours.

Mrs. Ogilvie returned from a fashionable reception between twelve and one in the morning. Hortense was up and tired. She could scarcely conceal her yawns as she unstitched the diamonds which she had sewn on her mistress's dress earlier in the evening, and put away the different jewels. At last, however, her duties were over, and she went away to her room.

Mrs. Ogilvie got into bed, and closing her eyes, prepared to doze off into delicious slumber. She was pleasantly tired, and no more. As she sank into repose, the house in the country and the guests who would fill it mingled with her dreams. Suddenly she heard a clear voice in her ears. It awoke her with a sort of shock. She raised herself on her elbow, and saw her little daughter standing in her white nightdress by the bedside.

"Mother," said Sibyl.

"What are you doing there, Sibyl? Go back to bed directly."

"Please, mother, I can't sleep. I have got a sort of up-and-down and round-and-round feeling. I don't know what it is, but it's worse when I put my head on my pillow. I 'spect I'm lonesome, mother. Mother, I really, truly, am going to be sensible, and I know all about father; but may I get into your bed just at the other side? I will lie as still as a mouse; may I, mother?"

"Oh dear, how you tremble," said Mrs. Ogilvie; "how more than annoying this is! You certainly are not a sensible child at the present moment. If you felt so strange and nervous, why didn't you ask Nurse or Miss Winstead to sleep in the room with you?"

"But, mother, that wouldn't have done me any good."

"What do you mean?"

"They wouldn't be you. I'll be quite happy if I can get into bed alongside of you, mother."

"Of course you may, child, but please don't disturb me. I am very tired, and want to sleep."

Sibyl ran round to the other side of the bed, slipped in, and lay as quiet as a mouse.

Mrs. Ogilvie curled up comfortably, arranged her pillows, and closed her eyes. She was very sleepy, but what was the matter with her? She could not lose herself in unconsciousness. Was the perfectly still little figure by her side exercising some queer power over her, drawing something not often stirred within her heart to the surface? She turned at last and looked at the child. Sibyl was lying on her back with her eyes wide open.

"Why don't you shut your eyes and go to sleep?" asked her mother.

"I can't, on account of the round-and-roundness feeling," replied Sibyl.

"What a funny little thing you are. Here, give me your hand."

Mrs. Ogilvie stretched out her own warm hand and took one of Sibyl's. Sibyl's little hand was cold.

"May I come quite close to you, mother?" asked Sibyl.

"Yes, darling."

The next instant she was lying in her mother's arms. Her mother clasped her close to her breast and kissed her many times.

"Oh, now that's better," said the child with a sob. It was the first attempt at a sob which had come from her lips. She nestled cosily within her mother's clasp.

"I am much better," she said; "I didn't understand, but I understand now. I got his letter."

"Must we talk about it to-night, Sibyl?" asked her mother.

"Not much; there's not much to say, is there? He said I was to be good and to obey you. I was to be good all the time. It's very hard, but I 'spect I'll do it; I 'spect Lord Jesus will help me. Mother, why has father gone to Queensland? It's such a long, long way off."

"For a most excellent reason," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "You really are showing a great deal of sense, Sibyl. I never knew you more sensible about anything. I was afraid you would cry and make scenes and be naughty, and make yourself quite ill: that would have been a most silly, affected sort of thing to do. Your father has gone away just on a visit—we will call it that. He will be back before the summer is over, and when he comes back he will bring us—"

"What?" asked the child. "What has he gone for?"

"My dear child, he has gone on most important business. He will bring us back a great deal of *money,* Sibyl. You are too young yet to understand about money."

"No, I am not," said Sibyl. "I know that when people have not much money they are sorrowful. Poor Mr. Holman is."

"Who in the world is Mr. Holman?"

"He sells the toys in the back street near our house. I am very much obliged to you, mother, for that sovereign. Mr. Holman is going to send me some dusty toys to-morrow."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't 'splain, Mr. Holman understands. But, mother, I thought we had plenty of money."

"Plenty of money," echoed Mrs. Ogilvie; "that shows what a very silly little child you are. We have nothing like enough. When your father comes back we'll be rich."

"Rich?" said Sibyl, "rich?" She did not say another word for a long time. Her mother really thought she had dropped asleep. In about half an hour, however, Sibyl spoke.

"Is it nice, being rich?" she asked.

"Of course it is."

"But what does it do?"

"Do, it does everything. It gives you all your pretty frocks."

"But I am more comfy in my common frocks."

"Well, it gives you your nice food."

"I don't care nothing about food."

"It gives you your comfortable home, your pony, and—"

"Lord Grayleigh gave me my pony."

"Child, I cannot explain. It makes all the difference between comfort and discomfort, between sorrow and happiness."

"Do you think so?" said Sibyl. "And father has gone away to give me a nice house, and pretty clothes, and all the other things between being comfy and discomfy; and you want to be rich very much, do you, mother?"

"Very much indeed; I like the good things of life."

"I'll try and understand," said Sibyl. She turned wearily on her pillow, and the next instant sleep had visited the perplexed little brain.

CHAPTER X.

"Nursie," said Sibyl, two months after the events related in the last chapter, "mother says that when my ownest father comes back again we'll be very rich."

"Um," replied nurse, with a grunt, "do she?"

"Why do you speak in that sort of voice, nursie? It's very nice to be rich. I have been having long talks with mother, and she has 'splained things. It means a great deal to be rich. I am so glad that my father is coming back a very, very rich man. I didn't understand at first. I thought to be rich just meant to have lots of money, and big, big houses, and heaps of bags of sweeties, and toys and ponies, and, oh, the kind of things that don't matter a bit. But now I know what to be rich really is."

"Yes, dear," said nurse. She was seated in the old nursery close to the window. She was mending some of Sibyl's stockings. A little pile of neatly mended pairs lay on the table, and there was a frock which also wanted a darn reclining on the back of the old woman's chair.

Sibyl broke off and watched her nurse's movements with close interest.

"Why do you wear spectacles?" she asked suddenly.

"Because, my love, my sight is failing. I ain't as young as I was."

"What does 'not as young as you was' mean?"

"What I say, my dear."

"I notice," said Sibyl, thoughtfully, "that all very, very old people say they're not as young as they was, and so you wear spectacles 'cos you're not as young as you was, and 'cos you can't see as well as you did."

"That's about it, Missy, and when I have to darn the stockings of a naughty little Miss, and to mend holes in her dress, I have to put on my glasses."

"Then I'm glad we're going to be rich; it will be quite easy to 'splain why I am glad," continued Sibyl, thoughtfully. "When our gold comes, nursie, you'll never have to do no more darning, and you need never wear your glasses 'cept just to read lovely books. Oh, we'll do such a lot when we are rich. There's poor Mr. Holman: I was talking to him only yesterday. Do you know, Nursie, his shop isn't paying, not a bit, and he was, oh, so sad about it, and Mrs. Holman began to cry. She told me there's a new big toy-shop in Palace Road, a great big lovely *swampy* sort of shop: I mean by that, that it takes all the customers. They go in there and they spend their money, and there's none left for poor Mr. Holman. It's just 'cos he lives in Greek Street, and Greek Street is what is called a back street. Isn't it perfectly shameful, Nursie? Mr. Holman said if they could afford to have a shop in Palace Road he would get all the little boys and girls back again. But they won't come into his nice, quiet *back* street. I like back streets, don't you, Nursie? It's horrid of the boys and girls not to go to Mr. Holman's."

"It's the way of the world, dear," answered Nurse; "the world always goes with the prosperous people. Them that are struggling the world leaves behind. It's a cruel way, but it's the way the world has got."

"Then I hate the world," said Sibyl. "My beautiful Lord Jesus wouldn't allow it if He was on earth now, would He, Nursie?"

"Oh, my love, there'd be a lot of things *He'd* have to change if He came back; but don't ask me any more questions now, Missy. You go out with your governess. You don't get half enough of the air, to my way of thinking; you're looking peaky, and not what the master would like to see."

"But I am perfectly well," answered Sibyl, "I never felt better in all my borned days. You know, Nursie, I have got a lot to do now. Father gave me 'rections in that letter that nobody else is to see, and one of them was that I was to keep well, so I'll go for a walk if you think it will be good for me; only I just wish to say that when father comes back dear Mr. Holman shall have his shop in Palace Road, and a lot of fresh toys put in it, and then he'll be quite happy and smiling, and his shop will swamp up all the children, and all the pennies and all the half-pennies and sixpennies, and poor dear darling Mrs. Holman won't have to wipe away her tears any more."

Sibyl skipped out of the room, and Nurse said several times under her breath—

"Bless her! the darling she is!"

Smartly dressed, as was her mother's wish, the little girl now ran downstairs. Miss Winstead was not ready. Sibyl waited for her in the hall. She felt elated and pleased, and just at that moment a servant crossed the spacious hall, and opened the hall door. Standing on the steps was Mr. Rochester. Sibyl uttered a great whoop when she saw him, rushed forward, and seized him by the hand.

"Oh, I am glad to see you," she said. "Have you come to see me, or to see mother?"

"I am very glad to see you," replied the young man; "but I did call to see your mother."

"Well, come to the drawing-room, I'll entertain you till mother comes. Go upstairs, please, Watson, and tell mother that Mr. Rochester is here. Be sure you say Mr. Rochester—*nice* Mr. Rochester."

Watson smiled, as he often did when Sibyl addressed him, and nice Mr. Rochester and the little girl disappeared into the drawing-room.

Sibyl shut the door, took his hand, and looked earnestly into his face.

"Well?" she said.

"Why do you say that?" he asked, in some confusion.

"I was only wondering if Lady Helen had done it."

"Really, Sibyl, you say very queer things," answered Rochester. He sat down on a chair.

"Oh, you know you are awfully fond of her, and you want her to marry you, and I want her to marry you because I like you. You are very nice, very nice indeed, and you are rich, you know. Mother has been 'splaining to me about rich people. It's most 'portant that everybody should be rich, isn't it, Mr. Rochester? It's the only way to be truly, truly happy, isn't it?"

"That it is not, Sibyl. Who has been putting such an idea into your head?"

Sibyl looked at him, and was about to say, "Why, mother," but she checked herself. A cloud took some of the brightness out of her eyes. She looked puzzled for a moment, then she laughed.

"When my own father comes back again we'll all be rich people. I hope when you are very, very rich you'll make," she said, "dear Lady Helen happy. I am very glad, now, my father went to Australia. It gave me dreadful pain at the time, but when he comes back we'll all be rich. What has he gone about; do you know, Mr. Rochester?"

"Something about a gold mine. Your father is a great engineer, and his opinion with regard to the mine will be of the utmost value. If he says it is a good mine, with a lot of gold in it, then the British public will buy shares. They will buy shares as fast as ever they can."

"What are shares?" asked Sibyl.

"It is difficult to explain. Shares mean a little bit of the gold out of the mine, and these people will buy them in order to become rich."

"It's very puzzling," said Sibyl. "And it depends on father?"

"Yes, because if he says there is not much gold in the mine, then no one will buy shares. Don't you understand, it all depends on him."

"It's *very* puzzling," said Sibyl again. "Are you going to buy shares, Mr. Rochester?"

"I think so," he answered earnestly. "I

shall buy several shares, I think, and if I do I shall be rich enough to ask Lady Helen to marry me."

"And you will be happy?"

"Very happy if she says 'yes.' But Sibyl, this is a great secret between you and me, you must never tell it to anyone else."

"You may trust me," said Sibyl, "I never tell things I'm told not to tell. You can't think what wonderful 'portant things father has told me, and I never, never speak of them again. Then you'll be glad to be rich?"

"Yes, because I shall be happy if Lady Helen is my wife," he answered, and just then Mrs. Ogilvie came into the room.

Sibyl and Miss Winstead went out for their daily exercise. Sibyl had already ridden the pony in the morning. It was a nameless pony. Nothing would induce her to give it a title.

"When father comes back he'll christen my pony," she said, "but no one else shall. I won't give it no name till he comes back."

She enjoyed her rides on the brisk little pony's back. She was rapidly becoming a good horsewoman. When her mother did not accompany her the redoubtable Watson followed his little mistress, and the exercise did the child good, and helped to bring a faint colour to her cheeks.

Now she and Miss Winstead walked slowly

down the shady side of the street. Sibyl was pondering over many things.

"It is very hot this morning," said the governess.

"Oh, that don't matter," replied Sibyl. "Miss Winstead, is your head sometimes so full that it seems as if it would burst?"

"No," answered Miss Winstead, "I cannot say it is."

"Full of thoughts, you know."

"No," replied the governess again. "Don't turn in your toes, Sibyl, walk straight, turn your toes out a little, so; keep step with me. Little ladies ought to walk properly."

Sibyl took great pains to follow Miss Winstead's instructions. She was always taking great pains now. A wonderful lot of her naughtiness and daringness had left her. She was trying to be good. It was extremely irksome, but when she succeeded she felt a great glow of pleasure, for she believed herself near to her father.

"Miss Winstead," she said suddenly, "I have been thinking of something. It is most terribly 'portant. Would you greatly mind if we went to see the Holmans before we go back?"

"We shan't have time," replied Miss Winstead.

"Oh, but I want to go," said Sibyl, knitting her brows, "don't let us go into the stupid Park, do come to the Holmans."

"I cannot do it, Sibyl, it is impossible. We must be back rather early for lunch to-day, as your mother is going into the country this afternoon."

"Mother going into the country, what for?"

"I cannot tell you, it is not my affair."

"That means that you know, but you won't tell."

"You can put it in that way if you like. I won't tell. Now come into the Park, we can sit on one of the chairs under the trees and keep cool."

Sibyl obeyed unwillingly. She felt, as she said afterwards, as if Miss Winstead had rubbed her the wrong way.

"I am like a pussy-cat when its fur is rubbed quite the wrong side up," thought the little girl. "I don't like it, not a bit."

Presently she slipped her hand through her governess's arm, and said in a coaxing voice—

"Do come home through Greek Street; I do want just to say one word to Mr. Holman, you can't think how 'portant it is."

"I cannot, Sibyl; you must not ask me again." Here Miss Winstead took out her watch.

"We must hurry home," she said; "I had not the least idea the time was going so fast."

They left the Park, and came back in time for lunch. During lunch both Mrs. Ogilvie and her little daughter were very silent. Sibyl was thinking of the Holmans, and how more than important it was that she should see them soon; and Mrs. Ogilvie had another thought in her head, a thought which caused her eyes to dance with pleasure.

"Why isn't Mr. Rochester here?" said the little girl at last.

"He could not stay," replied Mrs. Ogilvie. "You and he are great friends, are you not, Sib?"

"He is nice, he is very nice," said the child; "he and Lady Helen—oh, more than nice. I like 'em very much, don't you, mother?"

"Yes, dear." Mrs. Ogilvie got up. "Good-bye, Sibyl, I shall be back late this evening."

"Good-bye, mother dear."

Mrs. Ogilvie left the room. Miss Winstead, having finished her lunch, desired Sibyl to be quick with hers, and then to follow her to the school-room. There was no one in the room now but Sibyl and the footman, Watson. Watson began to remove the things. Sibyl played with a biscuit. Suddenly she looked full up at the young man.

"Are you tired after your ride this morning, Watson?"

"No, Miss Sibyl, not at all."

"I wonder if you're awfully hungry, Watson?"

"Why so, Miss?"

"Because it's time for the servants' dinner."

"Well, Miss, I'm going down to the hall presently, when I shall have my appetite satisfied, thank you all the same for inquiring."

Watson greatly enjoyed having a private chat with Sibyl.

"You couldn't, pwaps," said the little girl, knitting her brows, "you couldn't, pwaps, come a short way down the street with me afore you begin your dinner?"

"Where do you want to go, Miss?"

"I want to see Mr. Holman; you know Mr. Holman, don't you, Watson? He is the dear, kind, nice, sorrowful man who keeps the dusty toys."

"I have heard of him from you, Miss."

"It's most 'portant that I should see him and his wife, and if you walked behind me, mother would not be very angry. Would you come, Watson? You might just put on your hat and come at once. I have not taken off my hat and coat. We can do it and be back afore Miss Winstead finds out."

Watson looked out of the window. He saw Mrs. Ogilvie at that moment go down the steps, closing the door behind her. She walked away in the direction of the nearest railway station. She held a dainty parasol over her head. He turned to where the eager little face of Sibyl was watching him.

"If you're very quick, Miss," he said, "I'll do it."

"You are good," said Sibyl. "Do you know, Watson, that you're a very nice man—you have very good impulses, I mean. I heard father once say of a man who dined here that he had good impulses, and I think he had a look of you; and you have very good impulses too. Now, let's go; do let's be quick."

A moment later the footman and the child were in the street. Sibyl walked on in front, and Watson a couple of feet behind her. Holman's shop was fortunately not far off, and they soon entered it.

"Watson," said the little girl, "you can stand in the doorway. It's very private, what I has to say to the Holmans; you must on no account listen."

"No, Miss, I won't."

Sibyl now entered the shop. Mrs. Holman was alone there. She was attending in the shop while her husband was eating his dinner. She looked very sad, and, as Sibyl expressed it afterwards, rusty. There were days when Mrs. Holman did present that appearance—when her cap seemed to want dusting and her collar to want freshness. Her black dress, too, looked a little worn. Sibyl was very, very sorry for her when she saw her in this dress.

"Dear! dear!" she said; "I am glad I came. You look as if you wanted cheering up. Mrs. Holman, I've splendid news for you."

"What is that, my dear little lady? That you have got money to buy another toy? But Mr. Holman said only as late as last night that he wouldn't send you another worn-out toy not for nobody. 'Taint fair, my love. It seems like playing on your generosity, my dear."

"But I like them," said the child; "I do really, truly. I paint them up with the paints in my paint-box and make them look as good as new. They are much, much more interesting than perfect toys, they are truly."

"Well, dear, your mother would not like it if she knew we treated you in what my husband says is a shabby way."

"Don't think any more about that now, Mrs. Holman. You both treat me as I love to be treated—as though I were your little friend."

"Which you are, darling—which you are."

"Well, Mrs. Holman, I must hurry; I must tell you my good news. Do you remember telling me last week that you had a hundred pounds put away in the Savings Bank, and that you didn't know what to do with it. You said, 'Money ought to make money, and you didn't know how your hundred pounds would make money.' It was such a funny speech, and you tried to 'splain it to me, and I tried to understand."

"It was silly of my husband and me to talk of it before you, Missy. It is true we have got a hundred pounds. It is a nest-egg against a rainy day."

"Now again you are talking funnily; a nest-egg against a rainy day?"

"Against a time of trouble when we may want to spend the money."

"Oh, I understand that," answered the child.

"And I had it well invested, but the money was paid back, and there was nothing for it but to pop it into the Post Office Savings' Bank."

"It's there still, is it?" said Sibyl, her eyes shining.

"Yes, dear."

"Well, now, what do you say to buying bits of gold with it?"

"Bits of gold with our hundred pounds?" said Mrs. Holman, staring at Sibyl.

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean; bits of gold. You will be able to if you keep it long enough. If you promise to keep that money safe you may be able to buy great lumps of gold out of my father's gold mine. My father has gone to Australia to—oh, I must not tell you, for it really is an awful, awful secret; but, anyhow, when he comes back you'll be able to make a lot of money out of your money, to buy heaps of bits of gold. Will you promise to keep that hundred pounds till father comes home? That's what I came about, to ask you to promise, and Watson came with me because Miss Winstead wouldn't. Will you promise, dear Mrs. Holman?"

"Bless you, darling," said Mrs. Holman, "so that is why your father has gone away. It do sound exciting."

"It's awfully exciting, isn't it? We shall all be so rich. Mother said so, and mother ought to know. You'll be rich, and I'll be rich, and dear, dear Nursie will be rich, and even Watson. Watson has got such good impulses. He'll be rich too, and he shall marry the girl he is fond of; and there is a friend of mine, he wants to marry another girl, and they shall be rich and they shall marry. Oh, nobody need be sorrowful any more. Everybody will be quite happy when father comes back. You'll be able to have your shop in Palace Road, and oh, be sure you keep that hundred pounds till then."

Sibyl did not wait for Mrs. Holman to make any further remark. Mrs. Holman's eyes looked bright and excited; the child dashed out of the shop.

"Come, Watson," she said, "you'll have a splendid appetite for your dinner, and you have done a very good deed. You have denied yourself, Watson, and made a sorrowful woman happy. What do you think of that?"

CHAPTER XI.

About this time Mrs. Ogilvie was subjected to a somewhat severe form of temptation. It had been one of the biggest dreams of her life to possess a country place. She had never been satisfied with the fact that she and her husband must live in town except when they went to lodgings at the seaside, or were on visits to their friends. She wanted to have their own country place to go to just when she pleased, a place where she could invite her friends whenever the whim seized her. In an evil moment, almost immediately after Ogilvie had gone to Australia, she had visited a house agent and told him some of her desires.

"My husband is not prepared to buy a place now," she said in conclusion, "but he soon will be in a position to do so, and I want you to look round for me and tell me if anything nice happens to come into the market."

The agent had replied that he would be sure to let his client know if anything suitable came his way. Very soon places, apparently quite to Mrs. Ogilvie's heart, did come in the agent's way, and then somehow, in some fashion, other house agents got wind of Mrs. Ogilvie's desire, and now scarcely a post came that did not bring her most tempting prospectuses with regard to country places. There was one in particular which so exactly pleased her that she became quite *distrait* and restless except when she was talking of it. She went to see this special place several times. It was on the Thames just above Richmond. The grounds sloped down to the water. The house itself was built in a low, rambling, eccentric fashion. It covered a considerable extent of ground; there were several gardens, and they were all nicely kept and were bright with flowers, and had many overhanging trees. The house itself, too, had every modern comfort. There were many bedrooms and several fine reception rooms, and there were tennis and croquet lawns in the grounds, all smooth as velvet and perfectly level. There were also kitchen-gardens, and some acres of land as yet undevoted to any special purpose at the back of the house. It was just the sort of place which a man who was in a nice position in society might be glad to own. Its late owner had given it the somewhat eccentric title of Silverbel, and certainly the place was as bright and charming as its name.

This desirable little property was to be obtained, with its surrounding acres, for the modest sum of twenty thousand pounds, and Mrs. Ogilvie was so fascinated by the thought of being mistress of Silverbel, on the lovely winding River Thames, that she wrote to her husband on the subject.

"It is the very best place of its kind in the market," she wrote. "It was sold to its present owner for thirty thousand pounds, but he is obliged to live abroad and is anxious to sell it, and would give it for twenty thousand. I want you, when you receive this, to wire to me to carry on negotiations in your absence. I have already consulted our lawyer, Mr. Acland. He says the house is drained, and the air of the place would be just the kind to suit Sibyl. She would enjoy so much her row on the river, and all our friends would like it. With the money you must now have at your disposal you can surely gratify me with regard to Silverbel."

Mrs. Ogilvie had, of course, not yet received any answer to her letter, but she visited Silverbel twice a week, and took Sibyl also to see the beautiful place.

"It will be yours when father comes home," she said to the child.

Sibyl skipped about madly.

"It's just too 'licious!" she said. "Is this one of the things God gives us because we are rich? Isn't it kind of Lord Jesus to make us rich? Don't you love Him very, very much, mother?"

Mrs. Ogilvie always turned aside when Sibyl spoke to her about her love for the Lord Jesus. Not that she considered herself by any means an irreligious woman. She went to church always once, and sometimes twice on Sunday. She subscribed to any number of charities, and as the little girl now spoke her eyes became full of a soft light.

"We can have a bazaar here," she said, "a bazaar for the Home for Incurables at Watleigh. Lady Severn was talking to me about it last night, and said how terribly it needed funds. Sibyl, when father comes back we will have a great big bazaar here at lovely Silverbel, and a marquee on the lawn, and we will ask all the most charitable people in London to take stalls; some of the big-wigs, you know."

"Big-wigs?" said Sibyl, "what are they?"

"People, my dear child, who are high up in the social scale."

"I don't understand, mother," answered Sibyl. "Oh, do look at this rose, did you ever see such a perfect beauty? May I pick it, mother? It is just perfect, isn't it, not quite full out and yet not a bud. I'd like to send it to my ownest father."

"Silly child! Yes, of course you may pick it, but it will be dead long before it reaches him."

"It's heart won't be dead," said Sibyl. She did not know why she made the latter remark. She often did say things which she but half understood. She carefully picked the rose and fastened it into the front of her white dress. When she returned to town that evening she put the rose in water and looked at it with affectionate interest.

"What a pretty flower! Where did my darling get it?" said Nurse.

"At Silverbel, the beautiful, beautiful place that father is going to buy when he is rich. You can't think how good mother is growing, Nursie; she is getting better and better every day."

"H'm!" said Nurse.

"Why do you make those sort of noises when I speak of my mother? I don't like it," said the child. "But I must tell you about Silverbel. Mother says it is practicalically ours now. I don't quite know what she means by practicalically, but I suppose she means that it is almost our place. Anyhow, when my dearest rich father comes back it will be ours, and we are going to make poor Mr. Holman quite rich, and you, darling Nursie, quite rich and—and others quite rich. We are going to have a great big bazaar at Silverbel, and the *big-wigs* are coming to it. Isn't it a funny word! perhaps you don't know what big-wigs are, but I do."

Nurse laughed.

"Eat your supper and go to bed, Miss Sibyl. You are staying up a great deal too late, and you are learning things you had better know nothing about."

Meanwhile Mrs. Ogilvie downstairs was having a consultation with her lawyer.

"I don't want to lose the place," she said. "My husband is safe to be satisfied with my decision."

"If you have really made up your mind to pay twenty thousand pounds for the place, and I cannot say that I think it at all dear," replied the lawyer, "I have no objection to lending you a couple of thousand pounds to pay a deposit. You need not complete the purchase for at least three months, and I have not the slightest doubt I can further arrange that you may go into possession, say—well, any time you like after the deposit money is paid."

"Can you really?" said Mrs. Ogilvie, her eyes growing dark and almost passionate in their eagerness.

"At the worst it could be taken off your hands," he answered; "but doubtless, from what you tell me, Ogilvie will be well able to complete the thing; only remember, pray remember, Mrs.

Ogilvie, that this is rather a big matter, and if by any chance your husband does not find the Lombard Deeps all that Lord Grayleigh expects"—he paused and looked thoughtful. "I can lend you the money if you wish it," he said then abruptly.

"The money to enable me to pay a deposit?" she said.

"Yes; two thousand pounds; I believe the owners will take that on condition that the purchase is completed, say, in October."

"My husband will be back by then. I have a great mind to agree," she said. She almost trembled in her eagerness. After a moment's pause she spoke.

"I will accept your offer, Mr. Acland. I don't know where to go in August and September, and Silverbel will be the very place. Mr. Ogilvie will thank you most heartily for your generous trust in us both when he comes back."

"I have plenty of funds to meet this loan," thought the lawyer. "I am safe so far." Aloud he said, "Then I will go and see the owners to-morrow."

"This clinches the matter," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "I will begin ordering the furniture immediately."

The lawyer and the lady had a little further conversation, and then Mrs. Ogilvie dressed and went out to dine, and told many of her friends of her golden dreams.

"A place in the country, a place like Silverbel, has always been the longing of my life," she said, and she looked pathetic and almost ethereal, as she spoke, and as though nothing pleased her more than a ramble through country lanes with buttercups and daisies within reach.

On the following Sunday, Rochester happened to lunch with Mrs. Ogilvie and her little daughter. Mrs. Ogilvie talked during the entire meal of the beautiful place which was soon to be hers.

"You shall come with Sibyl and me to see it to-morrow," she said. "I will ask Lady Helen to come too. I will send her a note by messenger. We might meet at Victoria Station at eleven o'clock, and go to Silverbel and have lunch at the little inn on the river."

Rochester agreed somewhat eagerly. His eyes brightened. He looked at Sibyl, who gave him a meaning, affectionate, sympathetic glance. She would enjoy very much seeing the lovers wandering through beautiful Silverbel side by side.

"It's the most darling, lovely place," she said; "nobody knows how beautiful it is. I do hope it will soon be ours."

"When our ship comes in, it will be ours," said Mrs. Ogilvie, and she laughed merrily and looked full of happiness.

When the servants left the room, however, Rochester bent forward and said something to Mrs. Ogilvie which did not please that good lady quite so much.

"Have you heard the rumours with regard to the Lombard Deeps Gold Mine?" he asked.

"What rumours?" Mrs. Ogilvie looked anxious. "I know nothing whatever about business," she said, testily, "I leave all that absolutely to my husband. I know that he considers the mine an excellent one, but his full report cannot yet have reached England."

"Of course it has not. Ogilvie's report in full cannot come to hand for another six weeks. I allude now to a paragraph in one of the great financial papers, in which the mine is somewhat depreciated, the gold being said to be much less to the ton than was originally supposed, and the strata somewhat shallow, and terminating abruptly. Doubtless there is no truth in it."

"Not a word, not a word," said Mrs. Ogilvie; "but I make a point of being absolutely ignorant with regard to gold mines. I consider it positively wrong of a woman to mix herself up in such masculine matters. All the sweet femininity of character must depart if such knowledge is carried to any extent."

"Lady Helen knows about all these sort of things, and yet I think she is quite feminine," said Rochester; and then he coloured faintly and looked at Sibyl, whose eyes danced with fun.

Mrs. Ogilvie slowly rose from the table.

"You will find cigars in that box," she said. "No, Sibyl, you are not to stay with Mr. Rochester; come to the drawing-room with me."

"Oh, do let her stay," said the young man, "she has often sat with me while I smoked before."

"Well, as you please, but don't spoil her," said the mother. She left the room, and Sibyl curled herself up luxuriously in a deep armchair near Mr. Rochester.

"I have a lot of things to ask you," she said; "I am not going to be like my ownest mother, I am going to be like Lady Helen. I want to understand about the gold mine. I want to understand why, if you give your money to a certain thing, you get back little bits of gold. Can you make the gold into sovereigns, is that what happens?"

"It is extremely difficult for me to explain," said Rochester, "but I think the matter lies in a nutshell. If your father gives a good report of the mine there will be a great deal of money subscribed, as it is called, by different people."

"What's subscribed?"

"Well, given. You know what it means when people ask your mother to subscribe to a charity?"

"Oh, yes, I know quite well; and Mr. and Mrs. Holman, they may subscribe, may they?"

"Yes, whoever they may be. I don't know Mr. and Mrs. Holman, but of course they may intend to subscribe, and other people will do the same, and if we give, say, a hundred pounds, we shall get back perhaps one hundred and fifty, perhaps two hundred."

"Oh, that's very nice," said Sibyl; "I seem to understand, and yet I don't understand."

"You understand enough, my dear little girl, quite enough. Don't puzzle your poor little brain. Your mother is right, these are matters for men."

"And you are quite certain that my father will say that the beautiful mine is full of gold?" said Sibyl.

"He will say it if the gold is there."

"And if it is not?"

"Then he will tell the truth."

"Of course," said Sibyl, proudly. "My father couldn't tell a lie if he was even to try. It would be impossible, wouldn't it, Mr. Rochester?"

"I should say quite impossible," replied Rochester firmly.

Sibyl raised her small hand, and stroked his brown cheek.

"You are awfully nice, you know," she said; "you are nice enough even for Lady Helen. I do hope father will find the mine full up to the brim with gold. Such a lot of people will be happy then."

"So they will," replied Rochester.

"And darlingest mother can have the beautiful place. Hasn't the new place got a lovely name—Silverbel?"

"It sounds very pretty, Sibyl."

"And you will come to-morrow and see it, won't you?"

"Yes."

"And you will bring Lady Helen?"

"Your mother will bring Lady Helen."

"It's all the same," replied Sibyl. "Oh, I am so glad."

She talked a little longer, and then went upstairs.

Miss Winstead often spent Sunday with her friends. She was not in the school-room now as Sibyl entered. Sibyl thought this was a golden opportunity to write to her father. She sat down and prepared to write a letter. This was always a somewhat laborious task. Her thoughts flowed freely enough, but her hand could not wield the pen quite quick enough for the eager thoughts, nor was her spelling perfect, nor her written thoughts quite so much to the point as her spoken ones. Nevertheless, it was full time for her father to hear from her, and she had a great deal to say. She took a sheet of paper, dipped her pen in the ink, and began:—

"DARLINGEST FATHER,—Yesterday I picked a rose at Silverbel, the place that mother wants us to have when you com bak rich. Here's the rose for you. Pwaps it will be withered, father, but its hart will be alive. Kiss it and think of Sibyl. It's hart is like my hart, and my hart thinks of you morning, noon, and night, evry night, father, and evry morning, and allways, allways during the hole of the day. It's most portant, father, that you should come back rich. It's most solum nesesarey. I do so hope the mine will be full up to the brim with gold, for if it is a lot of people here will be made happy. Have you found the mine yet, father, and is it ful to the brim of gold? You don't know how portant it is. It's cos of Mr. and Mrs. Holman, father, and their dusty broken toys, and cos of Nursie and her spectakles, and cos of one who wants to marry another one, and I mustn't tell names, and cos of the bigwigs, father. Oh it is portant.

"Your lovin

"SIBYL."

"He'll understand," thought Sibyl; "he's wonderful for seeing right through a thing, and he'll quite know what I mean by the 'heart of the rose,'" and she kissed the rose passionately and put it inside the letter, and Nurse directed the letter for her, and it was dropped into the pillar-box that same night.

The letter was not read by the one it was intended for until—but that refers to another part of the story.

CHAPTER XII.

The next day was a glorious one, and Lady Helen, Mr. Rochester, Mrs. Ogilvie, and Sibyl all met at Victoria Station in time to catch the 11:20 train to Richmond, the nearest station to Silverbel. There a carriage was to meet them, to take them to the house. They were to lunch at a small inn close by, and afterwards have a row on the river; altogether a very delightful day was planned.

It was now the heart of a glorious summer—such a summer as does not often visit England. The sky was cloudless; the sun shone, but the great heat was tempered by a soft, delicious breeze.

Sibyl, all in white, with a white shady hat making her little face even more lovely than usual, stood by her mother's side, close to a first-class carriage, to await the arrival of the other two.

Lady Helen and Rochester were seen walking slowly down the platform. Sibyl gave one of her gleeful shouts, and ran to meet them.

"Here you both is!" she said, and she looked full up at Lady Helen, with such a charming glance of mingled affection and understanding, that Lady Helen blushed, in spite of herself.

Lady Helen Douglas was a very nice-looking girl, not exactly pretty, but her grey eyes were capable of many shades of emotion. They were large, and full of intelligence. Her complexion was almost colourless. She had a slim, graceful figure. Her jet-black hair, which she wore softly coiled round her head, was also thick and beautiful. Sibyl used to like to touch that hair, and loved very much to nestle up close to the graceful figure, and take shy peeps into the depths of the eyes which seemed to hold secrets.

" You do look nice," said Sibyl, speaking in a semi-whisper, but in a tone of great ecstasy, " and so does Mr. Rochester. Do you know, I always call him nice Mr. Rochester. Watson is so interested in him."

" Who is Watson ? " asked Lady Helen.

" Don't you know, he is our footman. He is very nice too ; he is full of impulses, and they are all good. I expect the reason he is so awfully interested in *dear* Mr. Rochester is because they are both having love affairs. You know, Watson has a girl too he is awfully fond of ; I 'spect they'll marry when father comes back with all the gold. You don't know how fond I am of Watson ; he's a very great, special friend of mine.

Now here's the carriage. Let's all get in. Aren't you both glad you're coming, and coming together, both of you *together,* to visit Silverbel? It's a 'licious place; there are all kinds of little private walks and shrubberies, and seats for two under trees. Two that want to be alone can be alone at Silverbel. Now let's all get into the carriage."

Poor Rochester and Lady Helen at that moment thought Sibyl almost an *enfant terrible.* However, there was no help for it. She would have her say, and her words were bright and her interest of the keenest. It mattered nothing at all to her that passers-by turned to look and smiled in an amused way.

Mrs. Oglvie was in an excellent humour. All the way down she talked to Lady Helen of the bazaar which she had already arranged was to take place at Silverbel during the last week in August.

"I had meant to put it off until my husband returned," she remarked finally, "but on reflection that seemed a pity, for he is scarcely likely to be back before the end of October, and by then it would be too late; and, besides, the poor dear Home for Incurables needs its funds, and why should it languish when we are all anxious, more than anxious, to be charitable? Mr. Acland, my lawyer, is going to pay a deposit on the price of the estate, so I can enter into possession almost immediately. I am going to get Morris & Liberty to furnish the place, and I shall send down servants next week. But about the bazaar. I mean it to be perfect in every way. The stalls are to be held by unmarried titled ladies. Your services, Lady Helen, must be secured immediately."

"Oh, yes," cried Sibyl, "you are to have a most beautiful stall, a flower stall: what do you say?"

"If I have a stall I will certainly choose a flower stall," replied Lady Helen, and she smiled at Sibyl, and patted her hand.

They soon arrived at Richmond, and got into the carriage which was waiting for them, and drove to Silverbel. They had lunch at the inn as arranged, and then they wandered about the grounds, and presently Sibyl had her wish, for Rochester and Lady Helen strolled away from her mother and herself, and walked down a shady path to the right of the house.

"There they go!" cried the child.

"There who go, Sibyl?" asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"The one who wants to marry the other," replied Sibyl. "Hush. mother, we are not to know, we are to be quite blind. Aren't you awfully incited?"

"You are a very silly, rude little girl," replied the mother. "You must not make the sort of remarks you are always making to Mr. Rochester and Lady Helen. Such remarks are in very bad form. Now, don't take the slightest notice when they return."

"Aren't I to speak to them?" asked Sibyl, raising her eyes in wonder.

"Of course, but you are not to say anything special."

"Oh, nothing special. Am I to talk about the weather?"

"No; don't be such a little goose."

"I always notice," replied Sibyl, softly, "that when *quite* strangers meet, they talk about the weather. I thought that was why. Can't I say anything more—more as if they were my very dear old friends? I thought they'd like it. I thought they'd like to know that there was one here who understanded all about it."

"About it?"

"Their love, mother, their love for—for each other."

"Who may the one be who is supposed to understand?"

"Me, mother," said Sibyl.

Mrs. Ogilvie burst into a ringing laugh.

"You are a most ridiculous little girl," she said. "Now, listen; you are not to take any notice when they come back. They are not engaged; perhaps they never will be. Anyhow, you will make yourself an intensely disagreeable child if you make such remarks as you have already made. Do you understand?"

"You has put it plain, mother," replied Sibyl. "I think I do. Now, let's look at the flowers."

"I have ordered the landlord of the inn to serve tea on the lawn," continued Mrs. Ogilvie. "Is it not nice to feel that we are going to have tea on our own lawn, Sibyl?"

"It's lovely!" replied Sibyl.

"I am devoted to the country," continued the mother; "there is no place like the country for me."

"So I think, too," replied Sibyl. "I love the country. We'll have all the very poorest people down here, won't we, mother?"

"What do you mean?"

"All the people who want to be made happy; Mr. and Mrs. Holman, and the other faded old people in the almshouses that I went to see one time with Miss Winstead."

"Now you are talking in your silly way again," replied Mrs. Ogilvie. "You make me quite cross when you talk of that old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Holman."

"But, mother, why aren't they to be rich if we are to be rich? Do you know that Mrs. Holman is saving up her money to buy some of the gold out of father's mine? She expects to get two hundred pounds instead of one. It's very puzzling, and yet I seem to understand. Oh, here comes Mr. Landlord with the tea-things. How inciting!"

The table was spread, and cake, bread and butter, and fruit provided. Lady Helen and Rochester came back. They both looked a little conscious and a little afraid of Sibyl, but as she turned her back on them the moment they appeared, and pretended to be intensely busy picking a bouquet of flowers, they took their courage in their hands and came forward and joined in the general conversation.

Lady Helen elected to pour out tea, and was extremely cheerful, although she could not help reddening when Sibyl brought her a very large marguerite daisy, and asked her to pull off the petals and see whether the rhyme came right.

"What rhyme?" asked Lady Helen.

"I know it all, shall I say it to you?" cried Sibyl. She began to pull off the different petals, and to repeat in a childish sing-song voice:—

"One he loves. two he loves, three he loves they say,
Four he loves with all his heart, five he casts away,
Six *he* loves, seven *she* loves, eight they both love.
    Nine he comes, ten he tarries,
    Eleven he woos, twelve he marries."

Sibyl repeated this nonsense with extreme gusto, and when the final petal on the large daisy proclaimed that "twelve he marries," she flung the stalk at Rochester and laughed gaily.

"I knew *you'd* have luck," she said. Then she caught her mother's warning eye and coloured painfully, thus making the situation, if possible, a little more awkward.

"Suppose we go for a row on the river this lovely afternoon," said Lady Helen, starting up restlessly. She had talked of the coming bazaar, and had wandered through the rooms at Silverbel, and had listened to Mrs. Ogilvie's suggestions with regard to furniture and different arrangements until she was almost tired of the subject.

Rochester sprang to his feet.

"I can easily get a boat," he said; "I'll go and consult with mine host."

He sauntered across the grounds, and Sibyl, after a moment's hesitation, followed him. A boat was soon procured, and they all found themselves on the shining silver Thames.

"Is that why our house is called Silverbel?" asked Sibyl. "Is it 'cos we can see the silver shine of the river, and 'cos it is *belle,* French for beautiful?"

"Perhaps so," answered the mother with a smile.

The evening came on, the heat of the day was over, the sun faded.

"What a pity we must go back to London," said Sibyl, "I don't think I ever had such a lovely day before."

"We shall soon be back here," replied Mrs. Ogilvie. "I shall see about furnishing next week at the latest, and we can come down whenever we are tired of town."

"That will be lovely," said Sibyl. "Oh, won't my pony love cantering over the roads here!"

When they landed at the little quay just outside the inn, the landlord came down to meet them. He held a telegram in his hand.

"This came for you, madam, in your absence," he said, and he gave the telegram to Mrs. Ogilvie. She tore it open. It was from her lawyer, Mr. Acland, and ran as follows:—

"Ominous rumours with regard to Lombard Deeps have reached me. Better not go any further at present with the purchase of Silverbel."

Mrs. Ogilvie's face turned pale. She looked up and met the fixed stare of her little daughter and of Rochester. Lady Helen had turned away. She was leaning over the rails of the little garden and looking down into the swift flowing river.

Mrs. Ogilvie's face grew hard. She crushed up the telegram in her hand.

"I hope there is nothing wrong?" asked Rochester.

"Nothing at all," she replied. "Yes, we will come here next week. Sibyl, don't stare in that rude way."

The return journey was not as lively as that happy one in the morning.

Sibyl felt through her sensitive little frame that her mother was worried about something. Rochester also looked anxious. Lady Helen alone seemed unconscious and *distrait*. When the child nestled up to her she put her arm round her waist.

"Are you sad about anything, darling Lady Helen?" whispered Sibyl.

"No, Sibyl; I am quite happy."

"Then you are thinking very hard?"

"I often think."

"I do so want you to be awfully happy."

"I know you do, and I think I shall be."

"Then that is right. *Twelve he marries.* Wasn't it sweet of the marguerite daisy to give Mr. Rochester just the right petal at the end; wasn't it luck?"

"Yes; but hush, don't talk so loud."

Mr. Rochester now changed his seat, and came opposite to where Lady Helen and the child had placed themselves. He did not talk to Lady Helen, but he looked at her several times. Presently he took one of Sibyl's hands, and stroked it fondly.

"Does Lady Helen tell you beautiful stories too?" asked Sibyl, suddenly.

"No," he answered; "she is quite naughty about that. She never tells me the charming stories she tells you."

"You ought to," said Sibyl, looking at her earnestly; "it would do him good. It's an awfully nice way, if you want to give a person a home truth, to put it into a story. Nurse told me about that, and I remembered it ever since. She used to put her home truths into proverbs when I was quite young, such as, 'A burnt child dreads the fire,' or 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure,' or—"

"Oh, that will do, Sibyl." Lady Helen spoke; there was almost a piteous appeal in the words.

"Well," said Sibyl, "perhaps it is better to put home truths into stories, not proverbs. It's like having more sugar. The 'home truth' is the pill, and when it is sugared all over you can swallow it. You can't swallow it *without* the sugar, can you? Nursie begins her stories like this: 'Miss Sibyl, once upon a time I knew a little girl,' and then she tells me all about a horrid girl, and I know the horrid girl is me. I am incited, of course, but very, very soon I get down to the pill. Now, I am sure, Mr. Rochester, there are some things you ought to be told, there are some things you do wrong, aren't there, Mr. Rochester?"

"Oh, Sibyl, do stop that ceaseless chatter," cried her mother from the other end of the carriage; "you talk the most utter nonsense," and Sibyl for once was effectually silenced.

The party broke up at Victoria Station, and Mrs. Ogilvie and her little daughter drove home. As soon as ever they arrived there Watson informed Mrs. Ogilvie that Mr. Acland was waiting to see her in the library.

"Tiresome man!" she muttered, but she went to see him at once. The electric light was on; the room reminded her uncomfortably of her husband. He spent a great deal of time in his library, more than a very happy married man would have done. She had often found him there with a perplexed brow, and a heart full of anxiety. She had found him there, too, in his rare moments of exultation and happiness. She would have preferred to see the lawyer in any room but this.

"Well," she said, "why did you send me that ridiculous telegram?"

"You would not be surprised if you had read the article which appeared to-day in *The Financial Enquirer.*"

"I have never heard of *The Financial Enquirer.*"

"But City men know it," replied Mr. Acland, "and to a great extent it governs the market. It is one of our leading financial papers. The rumours it alludes to may be untrue, but they will influence the subscriptions made by the public to the share capital. In fact, with so ominous an article coming from so first-rate a source, nothing but a splendid report from Ogilvie can save the mine."

Mrs. Ogilvie drummed with her delicate taper fingers on the nearest table.

"How you puzzle a poor woman with your business terms," she said. "What do I know about mines? When my husband left me he said that he would come back a rich man. He gave me his promise, he must keep his word."

"He will naturally keep his word if he can, and if the mine is all that Lord Grayleigh anticipates everything will be right," replied Acland. "There is no man more respected than Ogilvie in the City. His report as assayer will save the situation; that is, if it is first-rate. But if it is a medium report the capital will not be sufficiently subscribed to, and if the report happens to be bad the whole thing will fall through. We shall know soon now."

"This is very disturbing," said Mrs. Ogilvie.

"I have had a long, tiring day, and you give me a headache. When is my husband's report likely to reach England?"

"Not for several weeks, of course. It ought to be here in about two months' time, but we may have a cablegram almost any day. The public are just in a waiting attitude, they want to invest their money. If the mine turns out a good thing shares will be subscribed to any extent. Everything depends on Ogilvie's report."

"Won't you stay and have some supper?" said Mrs. Ogilvie, carelessly. "I have said already that I do not understand these things."

"I cannot stay, I came to see you because it is important. I want to know if you really wish to go on with the purchase of Silverbel. I am ready to pay a deposit for you of £2,000 on the price of the estate, which will, of course, clinch the purchase, and this deposit I have arranged to pay to-morrow, but under the circumstances would it not be best to delay? If your husband cannot give a good report of the mine he will not want to buy an expensive place like Silverbel. My advice to you, Mrs. Ogilvie, is to let Silverbel go. I happen to know at this moment of another purchaser who is only waiting to close if you decline. When your husband comes back rich you can easily buy another place."

"No other place will suit me except Silverbel," she answered.

"I strongly recommend you not to buy it now."

"And I intend to have it. I am going down there to live next week. Of course, you arranged that I could go in at once after the deposit was paid?"

"Yes, on sufferance, subject to your completing the purchase in October."

"Then pray don't let the matter be disturbed again. I shall order furniture immediately. You are quite a raven, a croaker of bad news, Mr. Acland."

Mr. Acland raised his hand in deprecation.

"I thought it only fair to tell you," he answered, and the next moment he left the house. As he did so, he uttered a solitary remark:

"What a fool that woman is! I pity Ogilvie."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was the last week in July when Mrs. Ogilvie took possession of Silverbel. She had ordered furniture in her usual reckless fashion, going to the different shops where she knew she could obtain credit. The house, already beautiful, looked quite lovely when decorated by the skillful hands which arranged draperies and put furniture into the most advantageous positions.

Sibyl's room, just over the front porch, was really worthy of her. It was a bower of whiteness and innocence. It had lattice windows which looked out on to the lovely grounds. Climbing roses peeped in through the narrow panes, and sent their sweet fragrance to greet the child when the windows were open and she put her head out.

Sibyl thought more than ever of her father as she took possession of the lovely room at Silverbel. What a beautiful world it was! and what a happy little girl she, Sibyl, thought herself in possessing such perfect parents. Her prayers became now passionate thanks. She had got so much that it seemed unkind to ask Lord Jesus for one thing more. Of course, He was making the mine full of gold, and He was making her father very, very rich, and everyone, everyone she knew was soon to be happy.

Lady Helen Douglas came to stay at Silverbel, and this seemed to give an added touch to the child's sense of enjoyment, for Lady Helen had at last, in a shy half whisper, told the eager little listener that she did love Mr. Rochester, and, further, that they were only waiting to proclaim their engagement to the world until the happy time when Sibyl's father came back.

"For Jim," continued Lady Helen, "will take shares in the Lombard Deeps, and as soon as ever he does this we can afford to marry. But you must not speak of this, Sibyl. I have only confided in you because you have been our very good friend all along."

Sibyl longed to write off at once to her father to hurry up matters with regard to the gold mine.

"Of course, it is full of gold, quite full," thought the child; "but I hope father will write, or, better still, come home quickly and tell us all about it."

She began to count the days now to her father's return, and was altogether in such a happy mood that it was delightful to be in her presence or to see her joyful face.

Sibyl was nearly beside herself with delight at having exchanged her dull town life for this happy country one. She quickly made friends with the poor people in the nearest village, who were all attracted by her bright ways and pretty face. Her mother also gave her a small part of the garden to do what she liked with, and when she was not digging industriously, or riding her pony, or talking to Lady Helen, or engaged in her lessons, she followed her mother about like a faithful little dog.

Mrs. Ogilvie was so pleased and contented with her purchase that she was wonderfully amiable. She often now sat in the long evenings with Sibyl by her side, and listened without impatience to the child's rhapsodies about her father. Mrs. Ogilvie would also be glad when Philip returned. But just now her thought of all thoughts was centred on the bazaar. This bazaar was to clinch her position as a country lady. All the neighbours round were expected to attend, and already she was busy drawing up programmes of the coming festivities, and arranging with a great firm in London for the special marquee, which was to grace her lawn right down to the river's edge.

The bazaar was expected to last for quite three days, and, during that time, a spirited band would play, and there would be various entertainments of all sorts and descriptions. Little boats, with coloured flags and awnings, were to be in requisition on the brink of the river, and people should pay heavily for the privilege of occupying these boats.

Mrs. Ogilvie clapped her hands almost childishly when this last brilliant idea came to her, and Sibyl thought that it was worthy of mother, and entered into the scheme with childish enthusiasm.

The third week in August was finally decided as the best week for the bazaar, and those friends who were not going abroad promised to stay at Silverbel for the occasion.

Some weeks after Mrs. Ogilvie had taken possession of Silverbel, Mr. Acland called to see her.

"We have had no cable yet from your husband," he said, "and the rumours continue to be ominous. I wish with all my heart we could silence them. I, myself, believe in the Lombard Deeps, for Grayleigh is the last man to lend his name or become chairman of a company which has not brilliant prospects; but I can see that even he is a little anxious."

"Oh, pray don't croak," was Mrs. Ogilvie's response; and then she once again likened Mr. Acland to the raven.

"You are a bird of ill-omen," she said, shaking her finger playfully in his face.

He frowned as she addressed him; he could not see the witticism of her remark.

"When people are perfectly happy and know nothing whatever with regard to business, what is the good of coming and telling these dismalities?" she continued. "I am nothing but a poor little feminine creature, trying to do good, and to make myself happy in an innocent way. Why will you come and croak? I know Philip quite well enough to be certain that he would not have set foot on this expedition if he had not been satisfied in advance that the mine was a good one."

"That is my own impression," said Mr. Acland, thoughtfully; "but don't forget you are expected to complete the purchase of Silverbel by the end of October."

"Oh! Philip will be back before then," answered Mrs. Ogilvie in a light and cheerful tone. "Any day now we may get a cablegram. Well, sweetheart, and what are you doing here?"

Sibyl had entered the room, and was leaning against the window frame.

"Any day we may expect what to happen, mother darling?" she asked.

"We may expect a cable from father to say he is coming back again."

"Oh! do you think so? Oh, I am so happy!"

Sibyl skipped lightly out of the room. She ran across the sunny, radiant garden, and presently found herself in a sort of wilderness which she had appropriated, and where she played at all sorts of solitary games. In that wilderness she imagined herself at times a lonely traveller, at other times a merchant carrying goodly pearls, at other times a bandit engaged in feats of plunder. All possible scenes in history or imagination that she understood did the child try to enact in the wilderness. But she went there now with no intention of posing in any imaginary part. She went there because her heart was full.

"Oh, Lord Jesus, it is so beautiful of you," she said, and she looked up as she spoke full at the blue sky. "I can scarcely believe my ownest father will soon be back again, it is quite too beautiful."

A few days after this, and towards the end of the first week in August, Sibyl was one day playing as usual in the grounds when the sound of carriage wheels attracted her attention. She ran down to see who was arriving, and a shout of delight came from her when she saw Lord Grayleigh coming down the drive. He called the coachman to stop and put out his head.

"Jump into the carriage, Sib, I have not seen you for some time. When are you going to pay me another visit at Grayleigh Manor?"

"Oh, some time, but not at present," replied Sibyl. "I am too happy with mother here to think of going away. Isn't Silverbel sweet, Lord Grayleigh?"

"Charming," replied Grayleigh. "Is your mother in, little woman?"

"I think so. She is very incited about the bazaar. Are you coming to the bazaar?"

"I don't know, I will tell you presently."

Sibyl laid her little hand in Lord Grayleigh's. He gave it a squeeze, and she clasped it confidingly.

"Do you know that I am so monstrous happy I scarcely know what to do," she said.

"Because you have got a pretty new place?"

"No, no, nothing of that sort. It's 'cos father is coming back afore long! He will cable, whatever that means, and soon afterwards he'll come. I'm always thanking Lord Jesus about it. Isn't it good of Him to send my ownest father back so soon?"

Lord Grayleigh made no answer, unless an uneasy movement of his feet signified a sense of discomfort. The carriage drew up at the porch and he alighted. Sibyl skipped out after him.

"Shall I find mother for you?" she said. "Oh, there she is on the lawn. Darlingest mother, she can think of nothing at present but the bazaar, when all the big-wigs are to be present. You're a big-wig, aren't you? I asked Nurse what big-wigs were, and she said people with handles. Mother said they were people in a *good social position.* I remembered the words so well 'cause I couldn't understand 'em, but when I asked Miss Winstead to 'splain, she said mother meant ladies and gentlemen, and when I asked her to tell me what ladies and gentlemen was, she said people who behaved nicely. Now isn't it all very puzzling, 'cos the person who I think behaves nicest of all is our footman, Watson. He has lovely manners and splendid impulses; and perhaps the next nicest is dear Mrs. Holman, and she keeps a toy-shop in a back street. But when I asked mother if Watson and Mrs. Holman were big-wigs, she said I spoked awful nonsense. What do you think, Lord Grayleigh? Please do try to 'splain."

Lord Grayleigh had laughed during Sibyl's long speech. He now laid his hand on her arm.

"A big-wig is quite an ugly word," he said, "but a lady or a gentleman, you will find them in all ranks of life."

"You haven't 'splained a bit," said the little girl. "Mother wants big-wigs at her bazaar; you are one, so will you come?"

"I will answer that question after I have seen your mother."

Lord Grayleigh crossed the lawn, and Sibyl, feeling dissatisfied, turned away.

"He doesn't look quite happy," she thought; "I'm sorry he is coming to take up mother's time. Mother promised, and it's most 'portant, to ride with me this evening. It's on account of poor Dan Scott it is so 'portant. Oh, I do hope she won't forget. Perhaps Miss Winstead would come if mother can't. I promised poor Dan a basket of apples, and also that I'd go and sit with him, and mother said he should cert'nly have the apples, and that she and I would ride over with them. He broke his arm a week ago, poor fellow! poor little Dan! I'll go and find Miss Winstead. If mother can't come, she must."

Sibyl ran off in search of her governess, and Lord Grayleigh and Mrs. Ogilvie, in deep conversation, paced up and down the lawn.

"You didn't hear by the last mail?" was Lord Grayleigh's query.

"No, I have not heard for two mails. I cannot account for his silence."

"He is probably up country," was Lord Grayleigh's answer. "I thought before cabling that I would come and inquire of you."

"I have not heard," replied Mrs. Ogilvie. "Of course things are all right, and Philip was never much of a correspondent. It probably means, Lord Grayleigh, that he has completed his report, and is coming back. I shall be glad, for I want him to be here some time before October, in order to see about paying the rest of the money for our new place. What do you think of Silverbel?"

"Oh, quite charming," said Lord Grayleigh, in that kind of tone which clearly implied that he was not thinking about his answer.

"I am anxious, of course, to complete the purchase," continued Mrs. Ogilvie.

"Indeed!" Lord Grayleigh raised his brows.

"Mr. Acland lent me two thousand pounds to pay the deposit," continued the lady, "but we must complete by the end of October. When my husband comes back rich, he will be able to do so. He will come back rich, won't he?" Here she looked up appealingly at Lord Grayleigh.

"He will come back rich, or we shall have the deluge," replied the nobleman oracularly. "Don't be uneasy. As you have not heard I shall cable. I shall wire to Brisbane, which I fancy is his headquarters."

"Perhaps," answered Mrs. Ogilvie, in an abstracted tone. "By the way, if you are going back to town, may I make use of your carriage? There are several things I want to order for my bazaar. It is to be in about a fortnight now. You will remember that you are one of the patrons."

"Certainly," he answered; "at what date is the bazaar to be held?"

She named the arranged date, and he entered it in a gold-mounted engagement book.

"I shall stay in town, to-night," continued

Mrs. Ogilvie. "Just wait for me a moment, and I will get on my hat."

Soon afterwards the two were driving back to the railway station. Mrs. Ogilvie had forgotten all about her engagement to Sibyl. Sibyl saw her go off with a feeling of deep disappointment, for Miss Winstead had a headache, and declined to ride with the little girl. Dan Scott must wait in vain for his apples. But should he wait? Sibyl wondered.

She went down in a discontented way to a distant part of the grounds. She was not feeling at all happy now. It was all very well to have a heart bubbling over with good-nature and kindly impulses; but when those impulses were flung back on herself, then the little girl felt that latent naughtiness which was certainly an integral part of her character. She saw Dan Scott's old grandfather digging weeds in the back garden. Dan Scott was one of the gardener's boys. He was a bright, cheery-faced little fellow, with sloe-black eyes and tight curling hair, and a winsome smile and white teeth. Sibyl had made friends with him at once, and when he ceased to appear on the scenes a week back, she was full of consternation, for Dan had fallen from a tree, and broken his arm rather badly. He had been feverish also, and could not come to attend to his usual work. His old grandfather had at first rated the lad for having got into this trouble, but then he had pitied him.

Sibyl the day before had promised old Scott that she and her mother would ride to Dan's cottage and present him with a basket of early apples. There were some ripening now on the trees, long in shape, golden in colour, and full of delicious juice.

Sibyl had investigated these apples on her own account, and pronounced them very good, and had thought that a basket of the fruit would delight Dan. She had spoken to her mother on the subject, and her mother, in the height of good-humour, had promised that the apples should be gathered, and the little girl and she would ride down a lovely country lane to Dan's cottage. They were to start about six o'clock, would ride under the shade of some spreading beech trees, and come back in the cool of the evening.

The whole plan was delightful, and Sibyl had been thinking about it all day. Now her mother had gone off to town, and most clearly had forgotten her promise to the child.

"Well, Missy," said old Scott as he dug his spade deep down into the soil; "don't stand just there, Missy, you'll get the earth all over you."

Sibyl moved to a respectful distance.

"How is Dan?" she asked, after a pause.

"A-wrastling with his pain," answered Scott, a frown coming between his brows.

"Is he expecting me and mother with the beautiful apples?" asked Sibyl, in an anxious tone.

"Is he expecting you, Missy?" answered the old man raising his beetling brows and fixing his black eyes on the child. "Is he a-counting the hours? Do ducks swim, Missy, and do little sick boys a-smothered up in bed in small close rooms want apples and little ladies to visit 'em or not? You said you'd go, Missy, and Dan he's counting the minutes."

"Of course I'll go," replied Sibyl, but she looked anxious and *distrait*. Then she added, "I will go if I possibly can."

"I didn't know there was any doubt about it, Missy, and I tell you Dan is counting the minutes. Last thing he said afore I went out this morning was, 'I'll see little Missy to-day, and she is to bring me a basket of apples.' Seems to me he thinks a sight more of you than the fruit."

Sibyl turned pale as Scott continued to speak in an impressive voice.

"Dear, dear, it is quite dreadful," she said, "I could cry about it, I could really, truly."

"But why, Missy? What's up? I don't like to see a little lady like you a-fretting."

"Mr. Scott, I'm awfully, awfully sorry; I am terribly afraid I can't go."

Old Scott ceased to delve the ground. He leant on the top of his spade and looked full at the child. His sunken eyes seemed to burn into hers.

"You promised you'd go," he said then slowly.

"I did, I certainly did, but mother was to have gone with me, and she has had to go to town about the bazaar. I suppose you couldn't take back the apples with you when you go home to-night, Mr. Scott?"

"I could not," answered the old man. He began to dig with lusty and, in the child's opinion, almost venomous vigour.

"Besides," he added, "it wouldn't be the same. It's you he wants to see as much as the fruit. If I was a little lady I'd keep my word to the poor. It's a dangerous thing to break your word to the poor; there's God's curse on them as do."

Sibyl seemed to shrink into herself. She looked up at the sky.

"Lord Jesus wouldn't curse a little girl like me, a little girl who loves Him," she thought; but, all the same, the old man's words seemed to chill her.

"I'll do my very best," she said, and she went slowly across the garden. Old Scott called after ter her.

"I wouldn't disappoint the little lad if I was you, Missy. He's a-counting of the minutes."

A clock in the stable yard struck five. Old Scott continued to watch Sibyl as she walked away.

"I could take the apples," he said to himself; "I could if I had a mind to, but I don't see why the quality shouldn't keep their word, and I'm due to speak at the Mission Hall this evening. Little Miss should know afore she makes promises. She's a rare fine little 'un, though, for all that. I never see a straighter face, eyes that could look through you. Dear little Missy! Dan thinks a precious sight of her. I expect somehow she'll take him the apples."

So old Scott went on murmuring to himself, sometimes breaking off to sing a song, and Sibyl returned to the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

She walked slowly, her eyes fixed on the ground. She was thinking harder than she had ever thought before in the whole course of her short life. When she reached the parting of the ways which led in one direction to the sunny, pretty front entrance, and in the other to the stables, she paused again to consider.

Miss Winstead was standing in the new schoolroom window. It was a lovely room, furnished with just as much taste as Sibyl's own bedroom. Miss Winstead put her head out, and called the child.

"Tea is ready, you had better come in. What are you doing there?"

"Is your head any better?" asked Sibyl, a ghost of a hope stealing into her voice.

"No, I am sorry to say it is much worse, I am going to my room to lie down. Nurse will give you your tea."

Sibyl did not make any answer. Miss Winstead, supposing that she was going into the house, went to her own room. She locked her door, lay down on her bed, and applied aromatic vinegar to her forehead.

Sibyl turned in the direction of the stables.

"It don't matter about my tea," she said to herself. "Nursie will think I am with Miss Winstead, and Miss Winstead will think I am with nursie; it's all right. I wonder if Ben would ride mother's horse with me; but the first thing is to get the apples."

The thought of what she was about to do, and how she would coax Ben, the stable boy, to ride with her cheered her a little.

"It's awful to neglect the poor," she said to herself. "Old Scott was very solemn. He's a good man, is Scott, he's a very religious man, he knows his Bible beautiful. He does everything by the Psalms; it's wonderful what he finds in them—the weather and everything else. I asked him before the storm came yesterday if we was going to have rain, and he said, 'Read your Psalms and you'll know. Don't the Psalms for the day say "the Lord of glory thundereth?"' and he looked at a black cloud that was coming up in the sky, and sure enough we had a big thunderstorm. It's wonderful what a religious man is old Scott, and what a lot he knows. He wouldn't say a thing if it wasn't true. I suppose God does curse those who neglect the poor. I shouldn't like to be cursed, and I did promise, and Dan *will* be waiting and watching. A little girl whom Jesus loves ought to keep her promise. Well, anyhow, I'll get the apples ready."

Sibyl rushed into the house by a side entrance, secured a basket and entered the orchard. There she made a careful and wise selection. She filled the basket with the golden green fruit, and arranged it artistically with apple-leaves.

"This will tempt dear little Dan," she said to herself. There were a few greengages just beginning to come to perfection on a tree near. Sibyl picked several to add to her pile of tempting fruit, and then she went in the direction of the stables. Ben was nowhere about. She called his name, he did not answer. He was generally to be found in the yard at this hour. It was more than provoking.

"Ben! Ben! Ben!" called the child. Her clear voice sounded through the empty air. There came a gentle whinny in response.

"Oh, my darling Nameless Pony!" she thought. She burst open the stable door, and the next instant stood in the loose box beside the pony. The creature knew her and loved her. He pushed out his head and begged for a caress. Sibyl selected the smallest apple from the basket and gave it to her pony. The nameless pony munched with right good will.

"I could ride him alone," thought Sibyl; "it is only two or three miles away, and I know the road, and mother, though she may be angry when she hears, will soon forgive me. Mother never keeps angry very long—that is one of the beautiful things about her. I do really think I will go by my lone self. I made a promise. Mother made a promise too, but then she forgets. I really do think I'll go. It's too awful to remember your promise to the poor, and then to break it. I wonder if I could saddle pony? Pony, darling, will you stay very quiet while I try to put your saddle on? I have seen Ben do it so often, and one day I coaxed him to let me help him."

Just then a voice at the stable door said—

"Hullo! I say!" and Sibyl, starting violently, turned her head and saw a rough-headed lad of the name of Johnson, who sometimes assisted old Scott in the garden. Sibyl was not very fond of Johnson. She took an interest in him, of course, as she did in all human beings, but he was not fascinating like little Dan Scott, and he had not a religious way with him like old Scott; nevertheless, she was glad to see him now.

"Oh, Johnson," she said eagerly, "I want you to do something for me so badly. If you will do it I will give you an apple."

"What is it, Miss?" asked Johnson.

"Will you saddle my pony for me? You can, can't you?"

"I guess I can," answered Johnson. He spoke laconically.

"Want to ride?" he said. "Who's a-goin' with yer?"

"No one, I am going alone."

Johnson made no remark. He looked at the basket of apples.

"I say," he cried, "them's good, I like apples."

"You shall have two, Johnson; oh, and I have a penny in my pocket as well. Now please saddle the pony very fast, for I want to be off."

Johnson did not see anything remarkable in Sibyl's intended ride. He knew nothing about little Missy. As far as his knowledge went it was quite the habit for little ladies to ride by themselves. Of course he would get the pony ready for her, so he lifted down the pretty new side-saddle from its place on the wall, and arranged it on the forest pony's back. The pony turned his large gentle eyes, and looked from Johnson to the child.

"It don't matter about putting on my habit," said Sibyl. "It will take such a lot of time, I can go just as I am, can't I, Johnson?"

"If you like, Miss," answered Johnson.

"I think I will, really, Johnson," said Sibyl in that confiding way which fascinated all man-kind, and made rough-headed Johnson her slave for ever.

"I might be caught, you know, if I went back to the house."

"Oh, is that it?" answered Johnson.

"Yes, that's it; they don't understand. No one understands in the house how 'portant it is for me to go. I have to take the apples to Dan Scott. I promised, you know, and it would not be right to break my promise, would it, Johnson?"

Johnson scratched his head.

"I guess not!" he said.

"If I don't take them, he'll fret and fret," said Sibyl; "and he'll never trust me again; and the curse of God is on them that neglect the poor. Isn't it so, Johnson? You understand, don't you?"

"A bit, perhaps, Missy."

"Well, I am very much obliged to you," said the little girl. "Here's two apples, real beauties, and here's my new penny. Now, please lead pony out, and help me to mount him."

Johnson did so. The hoofs of the forest pony clattered loudly on the cobble stones of the yard. Johnson led the pony to the entrance of a green lane which ran at the back of Silverbel. Here the little girl mounted. She jumped lightly into her seat. She was like a feather on the back of the forest pony. Johnson arranged her skirts according to her satisfaction, and, with her long legs dangling, her head erect, and the reins in her hands, she started forward. The basket was securely fastened; and the pony, well pleased at having a little exercise, for he had been in his stable for nearly two days, started off at a gentle canter.

Sibyl soon left Silverbel behind her. She cantered down the pretty country road, enjoying herself vastly.

"I am so glad I did it," she thought; "it was brave of me. I will tell my ownest father when he comes back. I'll tell him there was no one to go with me, and I had to do it in order to keep my promise, and he'll understand. I'll have to tell darling mother, too, to-night. She'll be angry, for mother thinks it is good for me to bear the yoke in my youth, and she'll be vexed with me for going alone, but I know she'll forgive me afterwards. Perhaps she'll say afterwards, 'I'm sorry I forgot, but you did right, Sibyl, you did right.' I am doing right, aren't I, Lord Jesus?" and again she raised her eyes, confident and happy, to the evening sky.

The heat of the day was going over; it was now long past six o'clock. Presently she reached the small cottage where the sick boy lived. She there reined in her pony, and called aloud:

"Are you in, Mrs. Scott?"

A peevish-looking old woman wearing a bed-gown, and with a cap with a large frill falling round her face, appeared in the rose-covered porch of the tiny cottage.

"Ah! it's you, Missy, at last," she said, and she trotted down as well as her lameness would let her to the gate. "Has you brought the apples?" she cried. "You are very late, Missy. Oh, I'm obligated, of course, and I thank you heartily, Miss. Will you wait for the basket, or shall I send it by Scott to-morrow?"

"You can send it to-morrow, please," answered Sibyl.

"And you ain't a-coming in? The lad's expecting you."

"I am afraid I cannot, not to-night. Mother wasn't able to come with me. Tell Dan that I brought him his apples, and I'll come and see him to-morrow if I possibly can. Tell him I won't make him an out-and-out promise, 'cos if you make a promise to the poor and don't keep it, Lord Jesus is angry, and you get cursed. I don't quite know what cursed means, do you, Mrs. Scott?"

"Oh, don't I," answered Mrs. Scott. "It's a pity you can't come in, Missy. There, Danny, keep quiet; the little lady ain't no time to be a-visiting of you. That's him calling out, Missy;

you wait a minute, and I'll find out what he wants."

Mrs. Scott hobbled back to the house, and the pony chafed restlessly at the delay.

"Quiet, darling; quiet, pet," said Sibyl to her favourite, patting him on his arched neck.

Presently Mrs. Scott came back.

"Dan's obligated for the apples, Miss, but he thinks a sight more of a talk with you than of any apples that ever growed. He 'opes you'll come another day."

"I wish, I do wish I could come in now," said Sibyl wistfully; "but I just daren't. You see, I have not even my riding habit on, I was so afraid someone would stop me from coming at all. Give Danny my love. But you have not told me yet what a curse means, Mrs. Scott."

"Oh, that," answered Mrs. Scott, "but you ain't no call to know."

"But I'd like to. I hate hearing things without understanding. What is a curse, Mrs. Scott?"

"There are all sorts," replied Mrs. Scott. "Once I knowed a man, and he had a curse on him, and he dwindled and dwindled, and got smaller and thinner and poorer, until nothing would nourish him, no food nor drink nor nothing, and he shrunk up ter'ble until he died. It's my belief he haunts the churchyard now. No one likes to go there in the evening. The name of the man was Micah Sorrel. He was the most ter'ble example of a curse I ever comed acrost in my life."

"Well, I really must be going now," said Sibyl with a little shiver. "Good-bye; tell Dan I'll try hard to come and see him to-morrow."

She turned the pony's head and cantered down the lane. She did not consider Mrs. Scott a specially nice old woman.

"She's a gloomy sort," thought the child, "she takes a gloomy view. I like people who don't take gloomy views best. Perhaps she is something like old Scott, having lived with him so long as his wife, perhaps they have got to think things the same way. Old Scott looked very solemn when he said that it was a terrible thing to have the curse of the poor. I wonder what Micah Sorrel did. I am sorry she told me about him, I don't like the story. But there, why should I blame Mrs. Scott, for I asked her to 'splain what a curse was. I 'spect I'm a very queer girl, and I didn't really keep my whole word. I said positive and plain that I would take a basket of apples to Dan, and go and sit with him. I did take the apples, but I didn't go in and sit with him. Oh, dear, I'll have to go back by the churchyard. I hope Micah Sorrel won't be about. I shouldn't like to see him, he must be shrunk up so awful by now. Come along, pony darling, we'll soon be back home again."

Sibyl lightly touched the pony's ears with a tiny whip which Lord Grayleigh had given her. He whisked his head indignantly at the motion and broke into a trot, the trot became a canter, and the canter a gallop.

Sibyl laughed aloud in her enjoyment. They were now close to the churchyard. The sun was getting near the horizon, but still there was plenty of light.

"A little faster, as we are passing the churchyard, pony pet," said Sibyl, and she bent towards her steed and again touched him, nothing more than a feather touch, on his arched neck. But pony was spirited, and had endured too much stabling, and was panting for exercise; and, just at that moment, turning abruptly round a corner came a man waving a red flag. He was followed by a procession of school children, all shouting and racing. The churchyard was in full view.

Sibyl laughed with a sense of relief when she saw the procession. She would not be alone as she passed the churchyard, and doubtless Micah Sorrel would be all too wise to make his appearance, but the next instant she gave a cry of alarm, for the pony first swerved violently, and then rushed off at full gallop. The red flag had startled him, and the children's shouts were the final straw.

"Not quite so fast, darling," cried Sibyl; "a little slower, pet."

But pet and darling was past all remonstrances on the part of his little mistress. He flew on, having clearly made up his mind to run away from the red flag and the shouting children to the other end of the earth. In vain Sibyl jerked the reins and pulled and pulled. Her small face was white as death; her little arms seemed almost wrenched from their sockets. She kept her seat bravely. Someone driving a dogcart was coming to meet her. A voice called—

"Hullo! Stop, for goodness' sake; don't turn the corner. Stop! stop!"

Sibyl heard the voice. She looked wildly ahead. She had no more power to stop the nameless pony than the earth has power to pause as it turns on its axis. The next instant the corner was reached; all seemed safe, when, with a sudden movement, the pony dashed madly forward, and Sibyl felt herself falling, she did not know where. There was an instant of intense and violent pain, stars shone before her eyes, and then everything was lost in blessed unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XV.

On a certain morning in the middle of July the *Gaika* with Ogilvie on board entered the Brisbane River. He had risen early, as was his custom, and was now standing on deck. The lascars were still busy washing the deck. He went past them, and leaning over the taffrail watched the banks of low-lying mangroves which grew on either side of the river. The sun had just risen, and transformed the scene. Ogilvie raised his hat, and pushed the hair from his brow. His face had considerably altered, it looked worn and old. His physical health had not improved, notwithstanding the supposed benefit of a long sea voyage.

A man whose friendship he had made on board, and whose name was Harding, came up just then, and spoke to him.

"Well, Ogilvie," he cried, "we part very soon, but I trust we may meet again. I shall be returning to England in about three months from now. When do you propose to go back?"

"I cannot quite tell," answered Ogilvie. "It depends on how soon my work is over; the sooner the better as far as I am concerned."

"You don't look too well," said his friend. "Can I get anything for you, fetch your letters, or anything of that sort?"

"I do not expect letters," was Ogilvie's answer; "there may be one or two cables. I shall find out at the hotel."

Harding said something further. Ogilvie replied in an abstracted manner. He was thinking of Sibyl. It seemed to him that the little figure was near him, and the little spirit strangely in touch with his own. Of all people in the world she was the one he cared least to give his thoughts to just at that moment.

"And yet I am doing it for her," he muttered to himself. "I must go through with it; but while I am about it I want to forget her. My work lies before me—that dastardly work which is to stain my character and blemish my honour; but there is no going back now. Sibyl was unprovided for, and I have an affection of the heart which may end my days at any moment. For her sake I had no other course open to me. Now I shall not allow my conscience to speak again."

He made an effort to pull himself together, and as the big liner gradually neared the quay, he spoke in cheerful tones to his fellow-passengers.

Just as he passed down the gangway, and landed on the quay, he heard a voice exclaim suddenly—

"Mr. Ogilvie, I believe?"

He turned, and saw a small, dapper-looking man, in white drill and a cabbage-tree hat, standing by his side.

"That is my name," replied Ogilvie; "and yours?"

"I am Messrs. Spielmann's agent, and my name is Rycroft. I had instructions to meet you, and guessed who you were from the description given to me. I hope you had a good voyage."

"Pretty well," answered Ogilvie; "but I must get my luggage together. Where are you staying?"

"At the Waharoo Hotel. I took the liberty to book you a room. Shall we go up soon and discuss business; we have no time to lose?"

"As you please," said Ogilvie. "Will you wait here? I will return soon."

Within half an hour the two men were driving in the direction of the hotel. Rycroft had engaged a bedroom and private sitting-room for Ogilvie. He ordered lunch, and, after they had eaten, suggested that they should plunge at once into business.

"That is quite to my desire," said Ogilvie. "I want to get what is necessary through, in order to return home as soon as possible. It was inconvenient my leaving England just now, but Lord Grayleigh made it a condition that I should not delay an hour in examining the mine."

"If he wishes to take up this claim, he is right," answered Rycroft, in a grave voice. "I may as well say at once, Mr. Ogilvie, that your coming out is the greatest possible relief to us all. The syndicate ought to do well, and your name on the report is a guarantee of success. My proposal is that we should discuss matters a little to-day, and start early to-morrow by the *Townville* to Rockhampton. We can then go by rail to Grant's Creek Station, which is only eight miles from the mine. There we can do our business, and finally return here to draw up the report."

"And how long will all this take?" asked Ogilvie.

"If we are lucky, we ought to be back here within a month."

"You have been over the mine, of course, yourself, Mr. Rycroft?"

"Yes; I only returned to Brisbane a week ago."

"And what is your personal opinion?"

"There is, beyond doubt, alluvial gold. It is a bit refractory, but the washings panned out from five to six ounces to the ton."

"So I was told in England; but, about the vein underneath? Alluvial is not dependable as a continuance. It is the vein we want to strike. Have you bored?"

"Yes, one shaft."

"Any result?"

"That is what your opinion is needed to decide," said his companion. As Rycroft spoke, the corners of his mouth hardened, and he looked fixedly at Ogilvie. He knew perfectly well why Ogilvie had come from England to assay the mine, and this last question took him somewhat by surprise.

Ogilvie was silent. After a moment he jumped up impatiently.

"I may as well inquire for any letters or cables that are waiting for me," he said.

Rycroft lit his pipe and went out. He had never seen Philip Ogilvie before, and was surprised at his general appearance, and also at his manner.

"Why did they send him out?" he muttered. "Sensitive, and with a conscience: not the sort of man to care to do dirty work; but perhaps Grayleigh was right. If I am not much mistaken, he will do it all the same."

Rycroft whistled.

"I shall make my own pile out of this," he thought. He returned to the hotel later on, and the two men spent the evening in anxious consultation. The next day they started for Rockhampton, and late in the afternoon of the fourth day reached their destination.

The mine lay in a valley which had once been the bed of some prehistoric river, but was now reduced to a tiny creek. On either side towered the twin Lombard peaks, from which the mine was to take its name. For a mile on either side of the creek the country was fairly open, being dotted with clumps of briggalow throwing their dark shadows across the plain.

Beyond them, where the slope became steep, the dense scrub began. This clothed the two lofty peaks to their summits. The spot was a beautiful one, and up to the present had been scarcely desecrated by the hand of man.

"Here we are," said Rycroft, "here lies the gold." He pointed to the bed of the creek. "Here is our overseer's hut, and he has engaged men for our purpose. This is our hut, Ogilvie. I hope you don't mind sharing it with me."

"Not in the least," replied Ogilvie. "We shall not begin operations until the morning, shall we? I should like to walk up the creek."

Rycroft made a cheerful answer, and Ogilvie started off alone. He scarcely knew why he wished to take this solitary walk, for he knew well that the die was cast. When he had accepted Lord Grayleigh's cheque for ten thousand pounds he had burnt his boats, and there was no going back.

"Time enough for repentance in another world," he muttered under his breath. "All I have to do at present is to stifle thought. It ought not to be difficult to go forward," he muttered, with a bitter smile, "the downhill slope is never difficult."

The work of boring was to commence on the following morning, and the camp was made close to the water hole beneath some tall gum trees. Rycroft, who was well used to camping, prepared supper for the two. The foreman's camp was about a hundred yards distant.

As Ogilvie lay down to sleep that night he had a brief, sharp attack of the agony which had caused him alarm a couple of months ago. It reminded him in forcible language that his own time on earth was in all probability brief; but, far from feeling distressed on this account, he hugged the knowledge to his heart that he had provided for Sibyl, and that she at least would never want. During the night which followed, however, he could not sleep. Spectre after spectre of his past life rose up before him in the gloom. He saw now that ever since his marriage the way had been paved for this final act of crime. The extravagances which his wife had committed, and which he himself had not put down with a firm hand, had led to further extravagances on his part. They had lived from the first beyond their means. Money difficulties had always dogged his footsteps, and now the only way out was by a deed of sin which might ruin thousands.

"But the child—the child!" he thought; something very like a sob rose to his lips. Towards morning, however, he forced his thoughts into other channels, drew his blanket tightly round him, and fell into a long deep sleep.

When he awoke the foreman and his men were already busy. They began to bore through the alluvial deposit in several directions, and Ogilvie and Rycroft spent their entire time in directing these operations. It would be over a fortnight's work at least before Ogilvie could come to any absolute decision as to the true value of the mine. Day after day went quickly by, and the more often he inspected the ore submitted to him the more certain was Ogilvie that the supposed rich veins were a myth. He said little as he performed his daily task, and Rycroft watched his face with anxiety.

Rycroft was a hard-headed man, troubled by no qualms of conscience, anxious to enrich himself, and rather pleased than otherwise at the thought of fooling thousands of speculators in many parts of the world. The only thing that caused him fear was the possibility that when the instant came, Ogilvie would not take the final leap.

" Nevertheless, I believe he will," was Rycroft's final comment; " men of his sort go down deeper and fall more desperately than harder-headed fellows like myself. When a man has a conscience his fall is worse, if he does fall, than if he had none. But why does a man like Ogilvie undertake this sort of work? He must have a motive hidden from any of us. Oh, he'll tumble safe enough when the moment comes, but if he doesn't break his heart in that fall, I am much mistaken in my man."

Four shafts had been cut and levels driven in many directions with disappointing results. It was soon all too plain that the ores were practically valueless, though the commencement of each lode looked fairly promising.

After a little over a fortnight's hard work it was decided that it was useless to proceed.

" There is nothing more to be done, Mr. Ogilvie," said Rycroft, as the two men sat over their supper together. " For six months the alluvial will yield about six ounces to the ton. After that "—he paused and looked full at the grim, silent face of the man opposite him.

" After that? " said Ogilvie. He compressed his lips the moment he uttered the words.

Rycroft jerked his thumb significantly over his left shoulder by way of answer.

"You mean that we must see this butchery of the innocents through," said Ogilvie.

"I see no help for it," replied Rycroft. "We will start back to Brisbane to-morrow, and when we get there draw up the report; I had better attend to that part of the business, of course under your superintendence. We must both sign it. But first had we not better cable to Grayleigh? He must have expected to hear from us before now. He can lay our cable before the directors, and then things can be put in train; the report can follow by the first mail."

"I shall take the report back with me," said Ogilvie.

"Better not," answered his companion, "best trust Her Majesty's mails. It might so happen that you would lose it." As Rycroft spoke a crafty look came into his eyes.

"Let us pack our traps," said Ogilvie, rising. "The sooner we get out of this the better."

The next morning early they left the solitude, the neighbourhood of the lofty peaks, and the desecrated earth beneath. They reached Brisbane in about four days, and put up once more at the Waharoo Hotel. There the real business for which all this preparation had been made commenced. Rycroft was a past master in drawing up reports of mines, and Ogilvie now helped him with a will. He found a strange pleasure in doing his work as carefully as possible. He no longer suffered from qualms of conscience. The mine would work really well for six months. During that time the promoters would make their fortunes. Afterwards—the deluge. But that mattered very little to Ogilvie in his present state of mind.

"If I suffer as I have done lately from this troublesome heart of mine I shall have gone to my account before six months," thought the man; "the child will be provided for, and no one will ever know."

The report was a plausible and highly coloured one.

It was lengthy in detail, and prophesied a brilliant future for Lombard Deeps. Ogilvie and Rycroft, both assayers of knowledge and experience, declared that they had carefully examined the lodes, that they had struck four veins of rich ore yielding, after crushing, an average of six ounces to the ton, and that the extent and richness of the ore was practically unlimited.

They spent several days over this document, and at last it was finished.

"I shall take the next mail home," said Ogilvie, standing up after he had read his own words for the twentieth time.

"Sign first," replied Rycroft. He pushed the paper across to Ogilvie.

"Yes, I shall go to-morrow morning," continued Ogilvie, "The *Sahara* sails to-morrow at noon?"

"I believe so; but sign, won't you?"

Ogilvie took up his pen; he held it suspended as he looked again at his companion.

"I shall take a berth on board at once," he said.

"All right, old chap, but sign first."

Ogilvie was about to put his signature to the bottom of the document, when suddenly, without the least warning, a strange giddiness, followed by intolerable pain, seized him. It passed off, leaving him very faint. He raised his hand to his brow and looked around him in a dazed way.

"What is wrong," asked Rycroft; "are you ill?"

"I suffer from this sort of thing now and then," replied Ogilvie, bringing out his words in short gasps. "Brandy, please."

Rycroft sprang to a side table, poured out a glass of brandy, and brought it to Ogilvie.

"You look ghastly," he said; "drink."

Ogilvie raised the stimulant to his lips. He took a few sips, and the colour returned to his face.

"Now sign," said Rycroft again.

"Where is the pen?" asked Ogilvie.

He was all too anxious now to take the fatal plunge. His signature, firm and bold, was put to the document. He pushed it from him and stood up. Rycroft hastily added his beneath that of Ogilvie's.

" Now our work is done," cried Rycroft, " and Her Majesty's mail does the rest. By the way, I cabled a brilliant report an hour back. Grayleigh seemed anxious. There have been ominous reports in some of the London papers."

" This will set matters right," said Ogilvie. " Put it in an envelope. If I sail to-morrow, I may as well take it myself."

" Her Majesty's mail would be best," answered Rycroft. " You can see Grayleigh almost as soon as he gets the report. Remember, I am responsible for it as well as you, and it would be best for it to go in the ordinary way." As he spoke, he stretched out his hand, took the document and folded it up.

Just at this moment there came a tap at the door. Rycroft cried, " Come in," and a messenger entered with a cablegram.

" For Mr. Ogilvie," he said.

" From Grayleigh, of course," said Rycroft, " hom impatient he gets! Wait outside," he continued to the messenger.

The man withdrew, and Ogilvie slowly opened the telegram. Rycroft watched him as he read. He read slowly, and with no apparent change of feature. The message was short, but when his eyes had travelled to the end, he read from the beginning right through again. Then, without the slightest warning, and without even uttering a groan, the flimsy paper fluttered from his hand, he tumbled forward, and lay in an unconscious heap on the floor.

Rycroft ran to him. He took a certain interest in Ogilvie, but above all things on earth at that moment he wanted to get the document which contained the false report safely into the post. Before he attempted to restore the stricken man, he took up the cablegram and read the contents. It ran as follows:—

"*Sibyl has had bad fall from pony. Case hopeless. Come home at once.*"

"So Sibyl, whoever Sibyl may be, is at the bottom of Ogilvie's fall," thought Rycroft. "Poor chap! he has got a fearful shock. Best make all safe. I must see things through."

Without an instant's hesitation Rycroft took the already signed document, thrust it into an envelope, directed it in full and stamped it. Then he went to the telegraph messenger who was still waiting outside.

"No answer to the cable, but take this at once to the post-office and register it," he said; "here is money—you can keep the change."

The man departed on his errand, carrying the signed document.

Rycroft now bent over Ogilvie. There was a slightly blue tinge round his lips, but the rest of his face was white and drawn. His hands were clenched as though the last moments of consciousness had been agony unspeakable.

"Looks like death," muttered Rycroft. He unfastened Ogilvie's collar and thrust his hand beneath his shirt. He felt the faint, very faint beat of the heart.

"Still living," he murmured, with a sigh of relief. He applied the usual restoratives. In a few moments Ogilvie opened his eyes.

"What has happened?" he said, looking round him in a dazed way. "Oh, I remember, I had a message from London."

"Yes, old fellow, don't speak for a moment."

"I must get back at once; the child——"

"All right, you shall go in the *Sahara* to-morrow."

"But the document," said Ogilvie, "it—isn't needed; I want it back."

"Don't trouble about it now."

Ogilvie staggered to his feet.

"You don't understand. I did it because—because of one who will not need it. I want it back."

"Too late," said Rycroft, then. "That document is already in the post. Come, you must pull yourself together for the sake of Sibyl, whoever she is."

CHAPTER XVI.

There was a pretty white room at Silverbel in which lay a patient child. She lay flat on her back just as she had lain ever since the accident. Her bed was moved into the wide bay window, and from there she could look out at the lovely garden and at the shining Thames just beyond. From where she lay she could also see the pleasure boats and the steamers crowded with people as they went up and down the busy river, and it seemed to her that her thoughts followed those boats which went towards the sea. It seemed to her further that her spirit entered one of the great ships at the mouth of the Thames and crossed in it the boundless deep, and found a lonely man at the other side of the world into whose heart she crept.

"I am quite cosy there," she said to herself, "for father's perfect heart is big enough to hold me, however much I suffer, and however sad I am."

Not that Sibyl was sad, nor did she suffer. After the first shock she had no pain of any sort, and there never was a more tranquil little face than hers as it lay on its daintily frilled pillow and looked out at the shining river.

There was no part of the beautiful house half so beautiful as the room given up to her use. It might well and aptly be called the Chamber of Peace. Indeed, Miss Winstead, who was given to sentimentalities and had a poetic turn of mind, had called Sibyl's chamber by this title.

From the very first the child never murmured. She who had been so active, like a butterfly in her dancing motion, in her ceaseless grace, lay on her couch uncomplaining. And as to pain, she had scarcely any, and what little she had grew less day by day. The great specialist from London said that this was the worst symptom of the case, and established the fact beyond doubt that the spine was fatally injured. It was a question of time. How long a time no one could quite tell, but the great doctors shook their heads over the child, and an urgent cablegram was sent to Ogilvie to hurry home without a moment's delay.

But, though all her friends knew it, no one told Sibyl herself that she might never walk again nor dance over the smoothly-kept lawns, nor mount the nameless pony, nor carry apples to Dan Scott. In her presence people thought it their duty to be cheerful, and she was always cheerful herself. After the first week or so, during which she was more or less stunned and her head felt strangely heavy, she liked to talk and laugh and ask questions. As far as her active little brain went there was but little difference in her, except that now her voice was low, and sometimes it was difficult to follow the rapid, eager words. But the child's eyes were quite as clear and beautiful as ever, and more than ever now there visited them that strange, far-away look and that quick, comprehending gaze.

"I want nothing on earth but father, the touch of father's hand and the look in his face," she said several times; and then invariably her own eyes would follow the steamers and the boats as they went down the river towards the sea, and she would smile as the remembrance of the big ships came to her.

"Miss Winstead," she said on one of these occasions, "I go in my own special big ship every night across the sea to father. I sleep in father's heart every night, that's why I don't disturb you, and why the hours seem so short."

Miss Winstead had long ceased to scold Sibyl, and nurse was now never cross to the little girl, and Mrs. Ogilvie was to all appearance the most tender, devoted mother on earth.

When the child had been brought back after her accident Mrs. Ogilvie had not yet returned from town. She had meant to spend the night at the house in Belgrave Square. An urgent message, however, summoned her, and she arrived at Silverbel about midnight. She lost all self control when she saw the beautiful unconscious child, and went into such violent hysterics that the doctors had to take her from the room.

But this state of grief passed, and she was able, as she said to herself, to crush her mother's heart in her breast and superintend everything for Sibyl's comfort. It was Mrs. Ogilvie herself who, by the doctor's orders, sent off the cablegram which her husband received at the very moment of his fall from the paths of honor. It was she who worded it, and she thought of nothing at that moment but the child who was dying in the beautiful house. For the time she quite forgot her dreams of wealth and of greatness and of wordly pleasure. Nay, more, she felt just then that she could give up everything if only Sibyl might be saved. Mrs. Ogilvie also blamed herself very bitterly for forgetting her promise to the child. She was indeed quite inconsolable for several days, and at last had a nervous attack and was obliged to retire to her bed.

There came an answering cable from Ogilvie to say that he was starting on board the *Sahara,* and would be in England as quickly as the great liner could bring him across the ocean. But by the doctor's orders the news that her father was coming back to her was not told to Sibyl.

"Something may detain him; at any rate the suspense will be bad for her," the doctors said, and as she did not fret, and seemed quite contented with the strange fancy that she crossed the sea at night to lie in his arms, there was no need to give her any anxiety with regard to the matter.

But as the days went on Mrs. Ogilvie's feelings, gradually but surely, underwent a sort of revulsion. For the first week she was frantic, ill, nervous, full of intense self-reproach. But during the second week, when Sibyl's state of health assumed a new phase, when she ceased to moan in her sleep, and to look troubled, and only lay very still and white, Mrs. Ogilvie took it into her head that after all the doctors had exaggerated the symptoms. The child was by no means so ill as they said. She went round to her different friends and aired these views. When they came to see her she aired them still further.

"Doctors are so often mistaken," she said, "I don't believe for a single instant that the dear little thing will not be quite as well as ever in a short time. I should not be the least surprised if she were able to walk by the time Philip comes back. I do sincerely hope such will be the case, for Philip makes such a ridiculous fuss about her, and will go through all the apprehension and misery which nearly wrecked my mother's heart. He will believe everything those doctors have said of the child."

The neighbours, glad to see Mrs. Ogilvie cheerful once more, rather agreed with her in these views, that is, all who did not go to see Sibyl. But those who went into her white room and looked at the sweet patient's face shook their heads when they came out again. It was those neighbours who had not seen the child who quoted instances of doctors who were mistaken in their diagnoses, and Mrs. Ogilvie derived great pleasure and hope from their conversation.

Gradually, but surely, the household settled down into its new life. The Chamber of Peace in the midst of the house diffused a peaceful atmosphere everywhere else. Sibyl's weak little laugh was a sound to treasure up and remember, and her words were still full of fun, and her eyes often brimmed over with laughter. No one ever denied her anything now. She could see whoever she fancied, even to old

Scott, who hobbled upstairs in his stockings, and came on tiptoe into the room, and stood silently at the foot of the white bed.

" I won't have the curse of the poor, I did my best," said Sibyl, looking full at the old man.

" Yes, you did your best, dearie," he replied. His voice was husky, and he turned his head aside and looked out of the window and coughed in a discreet manner. He was shocked at the change in the radiant little face, but he would not allow his emotion to get the better of him.

" The blessing of the poor rests on you, dear little Miss," he said then, " the blessing of the poor and the fatherless. It was a fatherless lad you tried to comfort. God bless you for ever and ever."

Sibyl smiled when he said this, and then she gazed full at him in that solemn comprehending way which often characterized her. When he went out of the room she lay silent for a time; then she turned to Nurse and said with emphasis:

" I like old Scott, he's a very religious man."

" That he is, darling," replied Nurse.

" Seems to me I'm getting religious too," continued Sibyl. " It's 'cos of Lord Jesus, I 'spect. He is kind to me, is Lord Jesus. He takes me to father every night."

The days went by, and Mrs. Ogilvie, who was recovering her normal spirits hour by hour, now made up her mind that Sibyl's recovery was merely a question of time, that she would soon be as well as ever, and as this was the case, surely it seemed a sad pity that the bazaar, which had been postponed, should not take place.

"The bazaar will amuse the child, besides doing a great deal of good to others," thought Mrs. Ogilvie.

No sooner had this idea come to her, than she found her engagement-book, and looked up several items. The bazaar had of course been postponed from the original date, but it would be easy to have it on the 24th of September. The 24th was in all respects a suitable date, and those people who had not gone abroad or to Scotland would be glad to spend a week in the beautiful country house. It was such a sad pity, thought Mrs. Ogilvie, not to use the new furniture to the best advantage, not to sleep in the new beds, not to make use of all the accessories which had cost so much money, or rather which had cost so many debts, for not a scrap of the furniture was paid for, and the house itself was only held on sufferance.

"It will be doing such a good work," said Mrs. Ogilvie to herself. "I shall be not only entertaining my friends and amusing dear little Sibyl, but I shall be collecting money for an excellent charity."

In the highest spirits she ran upstairs and burst into her little daughter's room.

"Oh, Mummy," said Sibyl. She smiled and said faintly, "Come and kiss me, Mummy."

Mrs. Ogilvie was all in white and looked very young and girlish and pretty. She tripped up to the child, bent over her and kissed her.

"My little white rose," she said, "you must get some colour back into your cheeks."

"Oh, colour don't matter," replied Sibyl. "I'm just as happy without it."

"But you are quite out of pain, my little darling?"

"Yes, Mummy."

"And you like lying here in your pretty window?"

"Yes, mother darling."

"You are not weary of lying so still?"

Sibyl laughed.

"It is funny," she said, "I never thought I could lie so very still. I used to get a fidgety sort of pain all down me if I stayed still more than a minute at a time, but now I don't want to walk. My legs are too heavy. I feel heavy all down my legs and up to the middle of my back, but that is all. See, Mummy, how nicely

I can move my hands. Nursie is going to give me some dolls to dress."

"What a splendid idea, Sib!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, "you shall dress some dolls for mother's bazaar."

"Are you going to have it after all?" cried Sibyl, her eyes brightening. "Are the big-wigs coming?"

"Yes, pet, and you shall help me. You shall dress pretty little dolls which the big-wigs shall buy—Lord Grayleigh and the rest."

"I like Lord Grayleigh," replied Sibyl. "I am glad you are going to have the bazaar, Mummy."

Mrs. Ogilvie laughed with glee. She seated herself in a comfortable rocking chair near the window and chatted volubly. Sibyl was really a wonderfully intelligent child. It was delightful to talk to her. There was no narrowness about Sibyl. She had quite a breadth of view and of comprehension for her tender years.

"My dear little girl," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "I am so glad you like the idea. Perhaps by the day of the bazaar you will be well enough to come downstairs and even to walk a little."

Sibyl made no answer to this. After a moment's pause she said:

"Do have the bazaar and let all the big-wigs come. I can watch them from my bed. I can look out of the window and see everything—it will be fun."

Soon afterwards Mrs. Ogilvie left the room. She met Miss Winstead on the stairs.

"Miss Winstead," she said, "I have just been sitting with the child. She seems much better."

"Do you think so?" replied Miss Winstead shortly.

"I do. Why do you stare at me in that disapproving manner? You really are all most unnatural. Who should know of the health of her child if her own mother does not? The little darling is recovering fast—I have just been having a most interesting talk with her. She would like me to have the bazaar."

"The bazaar!" echoed Miss Winstead. "Surely you don't mean to have it here?"

"Yes, here. The child is greatly interested. She would like me to have it, and I am going to send out invitations at once. It will be held on the 24th and 25th of the month."

"I would not, if I were you," said Miss Winstead slowly. "You know what the doctors have said."

Mrs. Ogilvie first turned white, and then her face grew red and angry.

"I don't believe a single word of what they say," she retorted with some passion. "The child looks better every day. What the dear little thing wants is rousing. The bazaar will do her no end of good. Mark my words, Miss Winstead, we shall have Sibyl on her feet again by the 24th."

"You forget," said Miss Winstead slowly, "the *Sahara* is due in England about that date. Mr. Ogilvie will be back. He will not be prepared for—for what he has to see."

"I know quite well that my husband will return about then, but I don't understand what you mean by saying that he will not be prepared. There will be nothing but joyful tidings to give him. The child nearly herself and the bazaar at its height. Delightful! Now pray, my good creature, dont' croak any more; I must rush up to town this afternoon—there is a great deal to see about."

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord Grayleigh was so anxious about the Syndicate that he would not go to Scotland for the shooting as usual. Later on he would attend to his pleasures, but not now. Later on when Ogilvie had returned, and the company was finally floated, and the shares taken up, he would relax his efforts, but just at present he was engaged over the biggest thing of his life. He was cheerful, however, and full of hope. He even thanked Providence for having aided all his exertions. So blinded was he by the glare of avarice and the desire for adding wealth to wealth that Ogilvie's cablegram set every anxiety at rest. He even believed that the mine was as full of gold as the cablegram seemed to indicate. Yes, everything was going well. The Lombard Deeps Company would be floated in a short time, the Board of Directors was complete.

Ogilvie's cablegram was shown to a few of the longest-headed men in the financial world, and his report was anxiously looked for. Rumours carefully worded got by degrees into the public press, the ominous whispers were absolutely silenced: all, in short, was ripe for action. Nothing definite, however, could be done until the full report of the mine arrived.

Lord Grayleigh was fond of saying to himself: "From the tone of Ogilvie's cablegram the mine must be all that we desire, the ore rich, the veins good, the extent of the wealth unlimited. It will be nice," Lord Grayleigh reflected, "to be rich and also honest at the same time." He was a man with many kindly impulses, but he had never been much troubled by the voice of conscience. So he went backwards and forwards to his lovely home in the country, and played with his children, and enjoyed life generally.

On a certain day in the first week of September he received a letter from Mrs. Ogilvie, it ran as follows:—

"My Dear Lord Grayleigh,

"You have not, I hope, forgotten your promise to be, as Sibyl said, one of the big-wigs at my bazaar."

"But I *had* forgotten it," muttered Grayleigh to himself. "That woman is, in my opinion, a poor, vain, frivolous creature. Why did she hamper Ogilvie with that place in his absence?

Now, forsooth, she must play at charity. When that sort of woman does that sort of thing she is contemptible."

He lowered his eyes again, and went on reading the letter.

"I was obliged to postpone the original date," continued his correspondent, "but I have quite fixed now that the bazaar shall be held at our new lovely place on the 24th. You, I know, will not disappoint me. You will be sure to be present. I hope to clear a large sum for the Home for Incurables at Watleigh. Have you heard how badly that poor dear charity needs funds just now? If you hesitate for a moment to come and help, just cast a thought on the poor sufferers there, the children, who will never know the blessing of strength again. Think what it is to lighten the burden of their last days, and do not hesitate to lend your hand to so worthy a work. I have·advertised you in the papers as our principal supporter and patron, and the sooner we see you at Silverbel the better.

"With kind regards, I remain,
"Yours sincerely,
"MILDRED OGILVIE.

"P. S.—By the way, have you heard that our dear little Sibyl has met with rather a nasty accident? She fell off that pony you gave her.

I must be frank, Lord Grayleigh, and say that I never did approve of the child's riding, particularly in her father's absence. She had a very bad tumble, and hurt her back, and has since been confined to her couch. I have had the best advice, and the doctors have been very silly and gloomy in their reports. Now, for my part, I have not the slightest faith in doctors, they are just as often proved wrong as right. The child is getting much better, but she is still, of course, confined to her bed. She would send you her love if she knew I was writing."

Lord Grayleigh let his letter drop on to the table beside him. He sat quite still for a moment, then he lit a cigarette and began to pace the room. After a pause he took up Mrs. Ogilvie's letter and re-read the postscript.

After having read it a second time he rang his bell sharply. A servant appeared.

"I am going to town by the next train; have the trap round," was Grayleigh's direction.

He did go to town by the next train, his children seeing him off.

"Where are you going, father?" called out Freda. "You promised you would take us for a long, long drive this afternoon. Oh, this is disappointing. Are you coming back at all to-night?"

"I don't think so, Freda. By the way, have you heard that your little friend Sibyl has met with an accident?"

"Has she?" replied Freda. "I am very sorry. I like Sibyl very much."

"So do I!" said Gus, coming up, "she's the best sort of girl I ever came across, not like an ordinary girl—quite plucky, you know. What sort of accident did she have, father?"

"I don't know; I am going to see. I am afraid it has something to do with the pony I gave her. Well, good-bye, youngsters; if I don't return by the last train to-night, I'll be back early to-morrow, and we can have our drive then."

Lord Grayleigh drove at once to Victoria Station, and took the next train to Richmond. It was a two-mile drive from there to Silverbel. He arrived at Silverbel between five and six in the afternoon. Mrs. Ogilvie was pacing about her garden, talking to two ladies who had come to call on her. When she saw Lord Grayleigh driving up the avenue, she uttered a cry of delight, apologised to her friends, and ran to meet him—both her hands extended.

"How good of you, how more than good of you," she said. "This is just what I might have expected from you, Lord Grayleigh. You received my letter and you have come to answer it in person."

"I have come, as you say, to answer it in person. How is Sibyl?"

"Oh, better. I mean she is about the same, but she really is going on very nicely. She does not suffer the slightest pain, and——"

"Can I see her?"

"Of course you can. I will take you to her. Dear little thing, she will be quite delighted, you are a prime favourite of hers. But first, what about the bazaar? Ah, naughty man! you need not think you are going to get out of it, for you are, as Sibyl says, one of the big-wigs. We cannot do without big-wigs at our bazaar."

"Well, Mrs. Ogilvie, I will come if I can. I cannot distinctly promise at the present moment, for I may possibly have to go to Scotland; but the chances are that I shall be at Grayleigh Manor, and if so I can come."

Mrs. Ogilvie was walking with Lord Grayleigh down one of the corridors which led to the Chamber of Peace while this conversation was going on. As he uttered the last words she flung open the door.

"One of the big-wigs, Sibyl, come to see you," she said, in a playful voice.

Lord Grayleigh saw a white little face with very blue eyes turned eagerly in his direction. He did not know why, but as he looked at the child something clutched at his heart with a strange fear. He turned to Mrs. Ogilvie and said:

"Rest assured that I will come." He then went over, bent towards Sibyl and took her little white hand.

"I am sorry to see you like this," he said. "What has happened to you, my little girl?"

"Oh, nothing much," answered Sibyl, "I just had a fall, but I am quite all right now and I am awfully happy. Did you really come to see me? It is good of you. May I talk to Lord Grayleigh all by myself, mother darling?"

"Certainly, dear. Lord Grayleigh, you cannot imagine how we spoil this little woman now that she is lying on her back. I suppose it is because she is so good and patient. She never murmurs, and she enjoys herself vastly. Is not this a pretty room?"

"Beautiful," replied Lord Grayleigh, in an abstracted tone. He sank into a chair near the window, and glanced out at the smoothly kept lawn, at the flower-beds with their gay colours, and at the silver Thames flowing rapidly by. Then he looked again at the child. The child's grave eyes were fixed on his face; there was a faint smile round the lips, but the eyes were very solemn.

"I will come back again presently," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "By the way, Sib darling, Lord Grayleigh is coming to our bazaar, the bazaar for which you are dressing dolls."

"Nursie is dressing them," replied Sibyl in a weak voice—the mother did not notice how weak it was, but Lord Grayleigh did. "It somehow tires me to work. I 'spect I'm not very strong, but I'll be better perhaps to-morrow. Nursie is dressing them, and they are quite beautiful."

"Well, I'll come back soon; you musn't tire her, Lord Grayleigh, and you and I have a great deal to talk over when you do come downstairs."

"I must return to town by the next train," said Lord Grayleigh; but Mrs. Ogilvie did not hear him. She went quickly away to join the friends who were waiting for her in the sunny garden.

"Lord Grayleigh has come," she said. "He is quite devoted to Sibyl; he is sitting with her for a few minutes; the child worships him. Afterwards he and I must have a rather business-like conversation."

"Then we will go, dear Mrs. Ogilvie," said both ladies.

"Thank you, dear friends; I hope you don't think I am sending you away, but it is always my custom to speak plainly. Lord Grayleigh will be our principal patron at the bazaar, and naturally I have much to consult him about. I will drive over to-morrow to see you, Mrs. Le Strange, and we can discuss still further the sort of stall you will have."

The ladies took their leave, and Mrs. Ogilvie paced up and down in front of the house. She was restless, and presently a slight sense of disappointment stole over her, for Lord Grayleigh was staying an unconscionable long time in Sibyl's room.

Sibyl and he were having what he said afterwards was quite a straight talk.

"I am so glad you have come," said the little girl; "there are some things you can tell me that no one else can. Have you heard from father lately?"

"I had a cablegram from him not long ago."

"What's that?"

"The same as a telegram; a cablegram is a message that comes across the sea."

"I understand," said Sibyl. She thought of her pretty fancy of the phantom ships that took her night after night to the breast of her father.

"What are you thinking about?" said Lord Grayleigh.

"Oh, about father, of course. When he sent you that message did he tell you there was much gold in the mine?"

"My dear child," said Lord Grayleigh, "what do you know about it?"

"I know all about it," answered Sybil. "I am deeply interested, deeply."

"Well, my dear little girl, to judge from your father's message, the mine is full of gold, quite full."

"Up to the tip top?"

"Yes, you can express it in that way if you like, up to the tip top and down, nobody knows how deep, full of beautiful yellow gold. But don't let us talk of these things any more. Tell me how you really fell, and what that naughty pony did to you."

"You must not scold my darling nameless pony, it was not his fault a bit," said Sibyl. She turned first red and then whiter than usual.

"Do you greatly mind if I *don't* talk about it?" she asked in a voice of sweet apology. "It makes me feel——"

"How, dear?"

"I don't know, only I get the up and down and round and round feel. It was the feel I had when pony sprang; he seemed to spring into the air, and I fell and fell and fell. I don't like to get the feel back, it is so very round and round, you know."

"We won't talk of it," said Lord Grayleigh; "what shall I do to amuse you?"

"Tell me more about father and the mine full of gold."

"I have only just had the one cablegram, Sib, in which he merely stated that the news with regard to the mine was good."

"I am delighted," said Sibyl. "It's awfully good of Lord Jesus. Do you know that I have been asking Lord Jesus to pile up the gold in the mine. He can do anything, you know, and He has done it, you see. Isn't it sweet and dear of Him? Oh, you don't know all He has done for me! Don't you love Him very much indeed, Lord Grayleigh?"

"Who, Sibyl?"

"My Lord Jesus Christ, my beautiful Lord Jesus Christ."

Lord Grayleigh bent and picked up a book which had fallen on the carpet. He turned the conversation. The child's eyes, very grave and very blue, watched him. She did not say anything further, but she seemed to read the thought he wished to hide. He stood up, then he sat down again. Sibyl had that innate tact which is born in some natures, and always knew where to pause in her probings and questionings.

"Now," she continued, after a pause, "dear Mr. and Mrs. Holman will be rich."

"Mr. and Mrs. Holman," said Lord Grayleigh; "who are they?"

"They are my very own most special friends. They keep a toy shop in Greek Street, a back street near our house. Mrs. Holman is going to buy a lot of gold out of the mine. I'll send her a letter to tell her that she can buy it quick. You'll be sure to keep some of the gold for Mrs. Holman, she is a dear old woman. You'll be quite sure to remember her?"

"Quite sure, Sibyl."

"Hadn't you better make a note of it? Father always makes notes when he wants to remember things. Have you got a note-book?"

"In my pocket."

"Please take it out and put down about Mrs. Holman and the gold out of the mine."

Lord Grayleigh produced a small note-book.

"What do you wish me to say?" he inquired.

"Put it this way," said Sibyl eagerly, "then you won't forget. Some of the gold in the——"

"Lombard Deeps Mine," supplied Lord Grayleigh.

"Some of the gold in the Lombard Deeps Mine," repeated Sibyl, "to be kept special for dear Mr. and Mrs. Holman. Did you put that? Did you put *dear* Mr. and Mrs. Holman?"

"Just exactly as you have worded it, Sibyl."

"Her address is number ten, Greek Street, Pimlico."

The address being further added, Sibyl gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"That is nice," she said, "that will make them happy. Mrs. Holman has cried so often because of the dusty toys, and 'cos the children won't come to her shop to buy. Some children are very mean; I don't like some children a bit."

"I am glad you're pleased about the Holmans, little woman."

"Of course I am, and aren't you? Don't you like to make people happy?"

Again Lord Grayleigh moved restlessly.

"Have you any other notes for this book?" he said.

"Of course I have. There's the one who wants to marry the other one. I'm under a vow not to mention names, but they want to marry *so* badly, and they will in double quick time if there's gold in the mine. Will you put in your note book 'Gold to be kept for the one who wants to marry the other,' will you, Lord Grayleigh?"

"I have entered it," said Lord Grayleigh, suppressing a smile.

"And mother, of course," continued Sibyl, "wants lots of money, and there's my nurse, her eyes are failing, she would like enough gold to keep her from mending stockings or doing any more fine darning, and I'd like Watson to have some. Do you know, Lord Grayleigh, that Watson is engaged to be married? He is really, truly."

"I am afraid, Sibyl, I do not know who Watson is."

"Don't you? How funny; he is our footman. I'm awfully fond of him. He is full of the best impulses is Watson, and he is engaged to a very nice girl in the cookery line. Don't you think it's very sensible of Watson to engage himself to a girl in the cookery line?"

"I think it is thoroughly sensible, but now I must really go."

"But you won't forget all the messages? You have put them all down in your note-book. You won't forget any of the people who want gold out of the Lombard Deeps?"

"No, I'll be certain to remember every single one of them."

"Then that's all right, and you'll come to darling mother's bazaar?"

"I'll come."

"I am so glad. You do make me happy. I like big-wigs awfully."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A few days before the bazaar Lady Helen Douglas arrived at Silverbel. She had returned from Scotland on purpose. A letter from Lord Grayleigh induced her to do so. He wrote to Lady Helen immediately after seeing Sibyl.

"I don't like the child's look," he wrote; "I have not the least idea what the doctors have said of her, but when I spoke on the subject to her mother, she shirked it. There is not the least doubt that Mrs. Ogilvie can never see a quarter of an inch beyond her own selfish fancies. It strikes me very forcibly that the child is in a precarious state. I can never forgive myself, for she met with the accident on the pony I gave her. She likes you: go to her if you can."

It so happened that by the very same post there had come an urgent appeal from Mrs. Ogilvie.

"If you cannot come to the bazaar," she wrote to Lady Helen, "it will be a failure. Come you must. Your presence is essential, because you are pretty and well born, and you will also act as a lure to another person who can help me in various ways. I, of course, allude to our mutual friend, Jim Rochester."

Now Lady Helen, even with the attraction of seeing Mr. Rochester so soon again, would not have put off a series of visits which she was about to make, had not Lord Grayleigh's letter decided her. She therefore arrived at Silverbel on the 22nd of September, and was quickly conducted to Sibyl's room. She had not seen Sibyl for a couple of months. When last they had met, the child had been radiant with health and spirits. She was radiant still, but that quick impulsive life had been toned down to utter quiet. The lower part of the little body was paralysed, the paralysis was creeping gradually up and up. It was but a question of time for the loving little heart to be still for ever.

Sibyl cried with delight when she saw Lady Helen.

"Such a lot of big-wigs are coming to-morrow," she said, "but Lord Grayleigh does not come until the day of the bazaar, so you are quite the first. You'll come and see me very, very often, won't you?"

"Of course I will, Sibyl. The fact is I have come on purpose to see you. I should not have come to the bazaar but for you. Lord Grayleigh wrote to me and said you were not well, and he thought you loved me, little Sib, and that it would cheer you up to see me."

"Oh, you are sweet," answered the child, "and I do, indeed I do love you. But you ought to have come for the bazaar as well as for me. It is darling mother's splendid work of charity. She wants to help a lot of little sick children and sick grown up people: isn't it dear of her?"

"Well, I am interested in the bazaar," said Lady Helen, ignoring the subject of Mrs. Ogilvie's noble action.

"It is so inciting all about it," continued the little girl, "and I can see the marquee quite splendidly from here, and mother flitting about. Isn't mother pretty, isn't she quite sweet? She is going to have the most lovely dress for the bazaar, a sort of silvery white; she will look like an angel—but then she is an angel, isn't she, Lady Helen?"

Lady Helen bent and kissed Sibyl on her soft forehead. "You must not talk too much and tire yourself," she said; "let me talk to you. I have plenty of nice things to say."

"Stories?" said Sibyl.

"Yes, I will tell you stories."

"Thank you; I do love 'em. Did you ever tell them to Mr. Rochester?"

"I have not seen him lately."

" You'll be married to him soon, I know you will."

" We need not talk about that now, need we? I want to do something to amuse you."

" It's odd how weak my voice has grown," said Sibyl, with a laugh. " Mother says I am getting better, and perhaps I am, only somehow I do feel weak. Do you know, mother wanted me to dress dolls for her, but I couldn't. Nursie did 'em. There's one big beautiful doll with wings; Nurse made the wings, but she can't put them on right; will you put them on proper, Lady Helen?"

" I should like to," replied Lady Helen; " I have a natural aptitude for dressing dolls."

" The big doll with the wings is in that box over there. Take it out and sit down by the sofa so that I can see you, and put the wings on properly. There's plenty of white gauze and wire. I want you to make the doll as like an angel as you can."

Lady Helen commenced her pretty work. Sibyl watched her, not caring to talk much now, for Lady Helen seemed too busy to answer.

" It rests me to have you in the room," said the child, " you are like this room. Do you know Miss Winstead has given it such a funny name."

" What is that, Sibyl?"

"She calls it the Chamber of Peace—isn't it sweet of her?"

"The name is a beautiful one, and so is the room," answered Lady Helen.

"I do wish Mr. Rochester was here," was Sibyl's next remark.

"He will come to the bazaar, dear."

"And then, perhaps, I'll see him. I want to see him soon, I have something I'd like to say."

"What darling?"

"Something to you and to him. I want you both to be happy. I'm tremendous anxious that you should both be happy, and I think—I wouldn't like to say it to mother, for perhaps it will hurt her, but I do fancy that, perhaps, I'm going to have wings, too, not like dolly's, but real ones, and if I have them I might——"

"What, darling?"

"Fly away to my beautiful Lord Jesus. You don't know how I want to be close to Him. I used to think that if I got into father's heart I should be quite satisfied, but even that, even that is not like being in the heart of Jesus. If my wings come I must go, Lady Helen. It will be lovely to fly up, won't it, for perhaps some day I might get tired of lying always flat on my back. Mother doesn't know, darling mother doesn't guess, and I wouldn't tell her for all the wide world, for she thinks I'm going to get quite well again, but one night, when she thought I was asleep, I heard Nursie say to Miss Winstead: 'Poor lamb, she'll soon want to run about again, but she never can, never.' I shouldn't like to be always lying down flat, should you, Lady Helen?"

"No, darling, I don't think I should."

"Well, there it is, you see, you wouldn't like it either. Of course I want to see father again, but whatever happens he'll understand. Only if my wings come I must fly off, and I want everyone to be happy before I go."

Lady Helen had great difficulty in keeping back her tears, for Sibyl spoke in a perfectly calm, contented, almost matter-of-fact voice which brought intense conviction with it.

"So you must marry Mr. Rochester," she continued, "for you both love each other so very much."

"That is quite true," replied Lady Helen.

Sibyl looked at her with dilated, smiling eyes. "The Lombard Deeps Mine is full to the brim with gold," she said, in an excited voice. "I know—Lord Grayleigh told me. He has it all wrote down in his pocket-book, and you and Mr. Rochester are to have your share. When you are both very, very happy you'll think of me, won't you?"

"I can never forget you, my dear little girl. Kiss me, now—see! the angel doll is finished."

"Oh, isn't it lovely?" said the child, her attention immediately distracted by this new interest. "Do take it down to mother. She's dressing the stall where the dolls are to be sold; ask her to put the angel doll at the head of all the other dolls. Take it to mother, now. I can watch from my window—do go at once."

Lady Helen was glad of an excuse to leave the room. When she got into the corridor outside she stopped for a moment, put her handkerchief to her eyes, made a struggle to subdue her emotion, and then ran downstairs.

The great marquee was already erected on the lawn, and many of the stall-holders were arranging their stalls and giving directions to different workmen. Mrs. Ogilvie was flitting eagerly about. She was in the highest spirits, and looked young and charming.

"Sibyl sent you this," said Lady Helen.

Mrs. Ogilvie glanced for a moment at the angel doll.

"Oh, lay it down anywhere, please," she said in a negligent tone. But Lady Helen thought of the sweet blue eyes looking down on this scene from the Chamber of Peace. She was not going to put the angel doll down anywhere.

"Please, Mrs. Ogilvie," she said, "you must take an interest in it." There was something in her tone which arrested even Mrs. Ogilvie's attention.

"You must take a great interest in this doll," she continued. "Little Sibyl thinks so much of it. Forgive me, Mrs. Ogilvie, I——"

"Oh, what is it now," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "what can be the matter? Really everyone who goes near Sibyl acts in the most extraordinary way." She looked petulantly, as she spoke, into Lady Helen's agitated face.

"I cannot help thinking much of Sibyl," continued Lady Helen, "and I am very—more than anxious about her. I am terribly grieved, for—I think——"

"You think what? Oh, please don't begin to be gloomy now. You have only seen Sibyl for the first time since her accident. She is very much better than she was at first. You cannot expect her to look quite well all of a sudden."

"But have you had the very best advice for her?"

"I should rather think so. We had Sir Henry Powell down twice. Everything has been done that could be done. It is merely a question of time and rest. Time and rest will effect a perfect cure; at least, that is my opinion."

"But what is Sir Henry Powell's opinion?"

"Don't ask me. I don't believe in doctors. The child is getting better, I see it with my own eyes. It is merely a question of time."

"Sibyl is getting well, but not in the way you think," replied Lady Helen. She said the words with significance, and Mrs. Ogilvie felt her heart throb for a moment with a sudden wild pain, but the next instant she laughed.

"I never knew anyone so gloomy," she said, "and you come to me with your queer remarks just when I am distracted about the great bazaar. I am almost sorry I asked you here, Lady Helen."

"Well, at least take the doll—the child is looking at you," said Lady Helen. "Kiss your hand to her; look pleased even if you are not interested, and give me a promise, that I may take to her, that the angel doll shall stand at the head of the doll stall. The child wishes it; do not deny her wishes now."

"Oh, take her any message you like, only leave me, please, for the present. Ah, there she is, little darling." Mrs. Ogilvie took the angel doll in her hand, and blew a couple of kisses to Sibyl. Sibyl smiled down at her from the Chamber of Peace. Very soon afterwards Lady Helen returned to her little friend.

It was on the first day of the bazaar when all the big-wigs had arrived, when the fun was at its height, when the bands were playing merrily, and the little pleasure skiffs were floating up and down the shining waters of the Thames, when flocks of visitors from all the neighbourhood round were crowding in and out of the marquee, and people were talking and laughing merrily, and Mrs. Ogilvie in her silvery white dress was looking more beautiful than she had ever looked before in her life, that a tired, old-looking man appeared suddenly on the scene.

Mrs. Ogilvie half expected that her husband would come back on the day of the bazaar, for if the *Sahara* kept to her dates she would make her appearance in the Tilbury Docks in the early morning of that day. Mrs. Ogilvie hoped that her husband would get off, and take a quick train to Richmond, and arrive in time for her to have a nice straight talk with him, and explain to him about Sibyl's accident, and tell him what was expected of him. She was anxious to see him before anyone else did, for those who went in and out of the child's room were so blind, so persistent in their fears with regard to the little girl's ultimate recovery; if Mrs. Ogilvie could only get Philip to herself, she would tell him not to mind these people, she would assure him that the instincts of motherhood never really failed, that her own instincts assured her that the great doctors were wrong, and she herself was right. The child was slowly but gradually returning to the paths of health and strength.

If only Ogilvie came back in good time his wife would explain these matters to him, and tell him not to make a fool of himself about the child, and beg of him to help her in this great, this auspicious occasion of her life.

"He will look very nice when he is dressed in his best," she said to herself. "It will complete my success in the county if I have him standing by my side at the door of the marquee to receive our distinguished guests."

As this thought came her eyes sparkled, and she got her maid to dress her in the most becoming way, and she further reflected that when they had a moment to be alone the husband and wife could talk of the wonderful golden treasures which Ogilvie was bringing back with him from the other side of the world. Perhaps he had thought much of her, his dear Mildred, while he had been away.

"Men of that sort often think much more of their wives when they are parted from them," she remembered. "I have read stories to that effect. I dare say Philip is as much in love with me as he ever was. He used to be devoted to me when first we were married. There was nothing good enough for me then. Perhaps he has brought me back some jewels of greater value than I possess, I will gladly wear them for his sake."

But notwithstanding all her dreams and thoughts of her husband, Ogilvie did not come back to his loving wife in the early hours of the first day of the bazaar. Neither was there any message or telegram from him. In spite of herself Mrs. Ogilvie now grew a little fretful.

"As he has not come in time to receive our guests, if I knew where to telegraph, I would wire to him not to come now until evening," she thought. But she did not know where to telegraph, and the numerous duties of the bazaar occupied each moment of her time.

According to his promise Lord Grayleigh was present, and there were other titled people walking about the grounds, and Lady Helen as a stall-holder was invaluable.

Sibyl had asked to have her white couch drawn nearer than ever to the window, and from time to time she peeped out and saw the guests flitting about the lawns and thought of her mother's great happiness and wonderful goodness. The band played ravishing music, mostly dance music, and the day, although it was late in the season, was such a perfect one that the feet of the buyers and sellers alike almost kept time to the festive strains.

It was on this scene that Ogilvie appeared.

During his voyage home he had gone through almost every imaginable torture, and, as he reached Silverbel, he felt that the limit of his patience was almost reached. He knew, because she had sent him a cable to that effect, that his wife was staying in a country place, a place on the banks of the Thames. She had told him further that the nearest station to Silverbel was Richmond. Accordingly he had gone to Richmond, jumped into the first cab he could find, and desired the man to drive to Silverbel.

"You know the place, I presume?" he said.

"Silverbel, sir, certainly sir; it is there they are having the big bazaar."

As the man spoke he looked askance for a moment at the occupant of his cab, for Ogilvie was travel-stained and dusty. He looked like one in a terrible hurry. There was an expression in his grey eyes which the driver did not care to meet.

"Go as fast as you can," he said briefly, and then the man whipped up his horse and proceeded over the dusty roads.

"A rum visitor," he thought; "wonder what he's coming for. Don't look the sort that that fine young lady would put up with on a day like this."

Ogilvie within the cab, however, saw nothing.

He was only conscious of the fact that he was drawing nearer and nearer to the house where his little daughter—but did his little daughter still live? Was Sibyl alive? That was the thought of all thoughts, the desire of all desires which must soon be answered yea or nay.

When the tired out and stricken man heard the strains of the band, he did rouse himself however, and began dimly to wonder if, after all, he had come to the wrong house. Were there two houses called Silverbel, and had the man taken him to the wrong one? He pulled up the cab to inquire.

"No, sir," replied the driver, "it's all right. There ain't but one place named Silverbel here, and this is the place, sir. The lady is giving a big bazaar and her name is Mrs. Ogilvie."

"Then Sibyl must have got well again," thought Ogilvie to himself. And just for an instant the heavy weight at his breast seemed to lift. He paid his fare, told the man to take his luggage round to the back entrance, and jumped out of the cab.

The man obeyed him, and Ogilvie, just as he was, stepped across the lawn. He had the air of one who was neither a visitor nor yet a stranger. He walked with quick short strides straight before him and presently he came full upon his wife in her silvery dress. A large white hat trimmed with pink roses reposed on her head. There were nature's own pink roses on her cheeks and smiles in her eyes.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried, with a little start. She was quite clever enough to hide her secret dismay at his arriving thus, and at such a moment. She dropped some things she was carrying and ran towards him with her pretty hands outstretched.

"Why, Phil!" she said again. "Oh, you naughty man, so you have come back. But why didn't you send me a telegram?"

"I had not time, Mildred; I thought my own presence was best. How is the child?"

"Oh, much the same—I mean she is going on quite, *quite* nicely."

"And what is this?"

Ogilvie motioned with his hand as he spoke in the direction of the crowd of people, the marquee, and the band. The music of the band seemed to get on his brain and hurt him.

"What is all this?" he repeated.

"My dear Phil, my dear unpractical husband, this is a bazaar! Have you never heard of a bazaar before? A bazaar for the Cottage Hospital at Watleigh, the Home for Incurables; such a useful charity, Phil, and so much needed. The poor things are wanting funds dreadfully; they have got into debt, and something must be done to relieve them. Think of all the dear little children in those wards, Phil; the Sisters have been obliged to refuse several cases lately. It is most pathetic, isn't it? Oh, by the way, Lord Grayleigh is here, you will be glad to see him?"

"Presently, not now. How did you say Sibyl was?"

"I told you a moment ago. You can go and see her when you have changed your things. I wish you would go away at once to your room and get into some other clothes. There are no end of people you ought to meet. How strange you look, Phil."

"I want to know more of Sibyl." Here the husband caught the wife's dainty wrist and drew her a little aside. "No matter about other things at present," he said sternly. "How is Sibyl? Remember, I have heard no particulars; I have heard nothing since I got your cable. How is she? Is there much the matter?"

"Well, I really don't think there is, but perhaps Lady Helen will tell you. Shall I send her to you? I really am so busy just now. You know I am selling, myself, at the principal stall. Oh, do go into the house, you naughty dear; do go to your own room and change your things! I expected you early this morning, and Watson has put out some of your wardrobe. Watson will attend on you if you will ring for him. You will find there is a special dressing room for you on the first floor. Go, dear, do."

But Ogilvie now held both her hands. His own were not too clean; they were soiled by the dust of his rapid journey. He gripped her wrists tight.

"*Where* is the child?" he repeated again.

"Don't look at me like that, you quite frighten me. The child, she is in her room; she is going on nicely."

"But is she injured? Can she walk?"

"What could you expect? She cannot walk yet, but she is getting better gradually—at least, I think so."

"What you think is nothing, less than nothing. What do the doctors say?"

As Ogilvie was speaking he drew his wife gradually but surely away from the fashionably dressed people and the big-wigs who were too polite to stare, but who were all the time devoured with curiosity. It began to be whispered in the crowd that Ogilvie had returned, and that his wife and he were looking at certain matters from different points of view. There were several men and women present, who, although they encouraged Mrs. Ogilvie to have the bazaar, nevertheless thought her a heartless woman, and these people now were rather rejoicing in Ogilvie's attitude. He did not look like a person who could be trifled with. He drew his wife towards the shrubbery.

"I will see the child in a minute," he said, "nothing else matters. She is ill, unable to walk, lying down. I want to hear full particulars. If you will not tell them to me, I will send for the doctor. The question I wish answered is this, *what do the doctors say?*"

Tears filled Mrs. Ogilvie's pretty dark eyes.

"Really, Phil, you are too cruel. After these weeks of anxiety, which only a mother can understand, you speak to me in that tone, just as if the dear little creature were nothing to me at all."

"You can cry, Mildred, as much as you please, and you can talk all the sentimental stuff that best appeals to you, but answer my question now. What do the doctors say, and what doctors has she seen?"

"The local doctor here, our own special doctor in town, and the great specialist, Sir Henry Powell."

"Good God, that man!" said Ogilvie, starting back. "Then she must have been badly hurt?"

"She was badly hurt."

"Well, what did the doctors say? Give me their verdict. I insist upon knowing."

"They—they—of course, they are wrong, Phil. You are hurting me; I wish you would not hold my hands so tightly."

"Speak!" was his only response.

"They said at the time, of course they were mistaken, doctors often are. You cannot imagine how many diagnoses of theirs have been proved to be wrong. Yes, I learned that queer word; I did not understand it at first. Now I know all about it."

"Speak!" This one expression came from Ogilvie's lips almost with a hiss.

"Well, they said at the time that—oh, Phil, you kill me when you look at me like that! They said the case was——"

"Hopeless?" asked the man between his white lips.

"They certainly *said* it. But, Phil; oh, Phil, dear, they are wrong!"

He let her hands go with a sudden jerk. She almost fell.

"You knew it, and you could have that going on?" he said. "Go back to your bazaar."

"I certainly will. I think you are terribly unkind."

"You can have those people here, and that band playing, when you know *that*. Well, if such scenes give you pleasure at such a time, go and enjoy them."

He strode into the house. She looked after his retreating figure; then she took out her daintily-laced handkerchief, applied it to her eyes, and went back to her duties.

"I am a martyr in a good cause," she said to herself; "but it is bitterly hard when one's husband does not understand one."

CHAPTER XIX.

This was better than the phantom ship. This was peace, joy, and absolute delight. Sibyl need not now only lie in her father's arms at night and in her dreams. She could look into his face and hear his voice and touch his hand at all hours day and night.

Her gladness was so real and beautiful that it pervaded the entire room, and in her presence Ogilvie scarcely felt pain. He held her little hand and sat by her side, and at times when she was utterly weary he even managed to raise her in his arms and pace the room with her, and lay her back again on her bed without hurting her, and he talked cheerfully in her presence, and smiled and even joked with her, and they were gay together with a sort of tender gaiety which had never been theirs in the old times. At night, especially, he was her best comforter and her kindest and most tender nurse.

For the first two days after his return Ogilvie scarcely left Sibyl. During all that time he asked no questions of outsiders. He did not even inquire for the doctor's verdict. Where was the good of asking a question which could only receive one answer? The look on the child's face was answer enough to her father.

Meanwhile, outside in the grounds, the bazaar went on. The marquee was full of guests, the band played cheerily, the notable people from all the country round arrived in carriages, and bought the pretty things from the different stallholders and went away again.

The weather was balmy, soft and warm, and the little skiffs with their gay flags did a large trade on the river. Lord Grayleigh was one of the guests, returning to town, it is true, at night, but coming back again early in the morning. He heard that Ogilvie had returned and was naturally anxious to see him, but Ogilvie sent word that he could not see anyone just then. Grayleigh understood. He shook his head when Mrs. Ogilvie herself brought him the message.

"This cuts him to the heart," he said; "I doubt if he will ever be the same man again."

"Oh, Lord Grayleigh, what nonsense!" said the wife. "My dear husband was always eccentric, but as Sibyl recovers so will he recover his equanimity. It is a great shock to him, of course, to see her as she is now, dear little soul. But I cannot tell you how bad I was at first; indeed, I was in bed for nearly a week. I had a sort of nervous attack—nervous fever the doctor said. But I got over it. I know now, so assuredly, that the darling child is getting well that I am never unhappy about her. Philip will be just the same by-and-bye."

Grayleigh made no reply. He gave Mrs. Ogilvie one of his queer glances, turned on his heel and whistled softly to himself. He muttered under his breath that some women were poor creatures, and he was sorry for Ogilvie, yes, very sorry.

Grayleigh was also anxious with regard to another matter, but that anxiety he managed so effectually to smother that he would not even allow himself to *think* that it had any part in Ogilvie's curious unwillingness to see him.

At this time it is doubtful whether Ogilvie did refuse to see Grayleigh in any way on account of the mine, for during those two days he had eyes, ears, thoughts, and heart for no one but Sibyl. When anyone else entered her room he invariably went out, but he quickly returned, smiling as he did so, and generally carrying in his hand some treasure which he had brought for her across the seas. He would then draw his chair near the little white bed and talk to her in light and cheerful strains, telling her wonderful things he had seen during his voyage, of the sunsets at sea, of a marvellous rainbow which once spanned the sky from east to west, and of many curious mirages which he had witnessed. He always talked to the child of nature, knowing how she understood nature, and those things which are the special heritage of the innocent of the earth, and she was as happy during those two peaceful days as it was ever the lot of little mortal to be.

But, in particular, when Mrs. Ogilvie entered the sick room did Ogilvie go out. He had during those two days not a single word of private talk with his wife. To Miss Winstead he was always polite and tolerant; to Nurse be was more than polite, he was kind, and to Sibyl he was all in all, everything that father could be, everything that love could imagine. He kept himself, his wounded conscience, his fears, his heavy burden of sin in abeyance for the sake of the fast fleeting little life, because he willed, with all the strength of his nature, to give the child every comfort that lay in his power during her last moments.

But the peaceful days could not last long. They came to an end with the big bazaar. The band ceased to play on the lawn, the pleasure boats ceased to ply up and down the Thames, the lovely Indian summer passed into duller weather, the equinoctial gales visited the land, and Ogilvie knew that he must brace himself for something he had long made up his mind to accomplish. He must pass out of this time of quiet into a time of storm. He had known from the first that he must do this, but until the bazaar came to an end, by a sort of tacit consent, neither the child nor the man talked of the gold mine.

But now the guests having gone, even Lady Helen Douglas and Lord Grayleigh having left the house, Ogilvie knew that he must act.

On the morning of the third day after his return, Mrs. Ogilvie entered Sibyl's room. She came in quietly looking pale and at the same time jubilant. The result of the bazaar was a large cheque which was to be sent off that day to the Home for Incurables at Watleigh. Mrs. Ogilvie felt herself a very good and charitable woman indeed. She wore her very prettiest dress and had smiles in her dark eyes.

"Oh! my ownest darling mother, how sweet you look!" said little Sibyl. "Come and kiss me, darling mother."

Mrs. Ogilvie had to bend forward to catch the failing voice. She asked the child what she said. Sibyl feebly repeated her words.

"Don't tire her," said Ogilvie; "if you cannot hear, be satisfied to guess. The child wishes you to kiss her."

Mrs. Ogilvie turned on her husband a look of reproach. There was an expression in her eyes which seemed to say: " And you think that I, a mother, do not understand my own child." But Ogilvie would not meet his wife's eyes. He walked to one of the windows and looked out. The little white couch had been moved a trifle out of the window now that the weather was getting chilly, and a screen was put up to protect the child from any draught.

Ogilvie stood and looked across the garden. Where the marquee had stood the grass was already turning yellow, there were wisps of straw about; the scene without seemed to him to be full with desolation. Suddenly he turned, walked to the fireplace, and stirred the fire into a blaze. At that moment Miss Winstead entered the room.

" Miss Winstead," said Ogilvie, " will you sit with Sibyl for a short time? Mildred, I should like a word with you alone."

His voice was cheerful, but quite firm. He went up to Sibyl and kissed her.

" I shall soon be back, my little love," he said, and she kissed him and smiled, and watched both parents as they went out of the room.

" Isn't it wonderful," she said, turning to her governess, " how perfect they both are! I don't know which is most perfect; only, of course I can't help it, but I like father's way best."

"I should think you did," replied Miss Winstead. "Shall I go on reading you the new fairy tale, Sibyl?"

"Not to-day, thank you, Miss Winstead," answered Sibyl.

"Then what shall I read?"

"I don't think anything, just now. Father has been reading the most beautiful inciting things about a saint called John, who wrote a story about the New Jerusalem. Did you ever read it?"

"You mean a story out of the Bible, from the Book of Revelation?"

"Perhaps so; I don't quite know what part of the Bible. Oh, it's most wonderful inciting, and father reads so splendid. It's about what happens to people when their wings are grown long. Did you never read about it, Miss Winstead? The New Jerusalem *is* so lovely, with streets paved with gold, same as the gold in the gold mine, you know, and gates all made of big pearls, each gate one big whole pearl. I won't ask you to read about it, 'cos I like father's way of reading best; but it's all most wonderful and beautiful."

The child lay with a smile on her face. She could see a little way across the garden from where she lay.

Meanwhile Ogilvie and his wife had gone

downstairs. When they reached the wide central hall, he asked her to accompany him into a room which was meant to be a library. It looked out towards the back of the house, and was not quite in the same absolute order as the other beautiful rooms were in. Ogilvie perhaps chose it for that reason.

The moment they had both got into the room he closed the door, and turned and faced his wife.

"Now, Mildred," he said, "I wish to understand—God knows I am the last person who ought to reproach you—but I must clearly understand what this means."

"What it means?" she repeated. "Why do you speak in that tone? Oh, it's very fine to say you do not mean to reproach me, but your eyes and the tone of your voice reproach me. You have been very cruel to me, Philip, these last two days. What I have suffered, God only knows. I have gone through the most fearful strain; I, alone, unaided by you, have had to keep the bazaar going, to entertain our distinguished guests, to be here, there, and everywhere, but, thank goodness, we did collect a nice little sum for the Home for Incurables. I wonder, Philip, when you think of your own dear little daughter, and what she may——"

"Hush!" said the man.

Mrs. Ogilvie paused in her rapid flow of words, and looked at him with interrogation in her eyes.

"I refuse to allow Sibyl's name to enter into this matter," he said. "You did what you did, God knows with what motive. I don't care, and I do not mean to inquire. The question I have now to ask is, what is the meaning of *this?*" As he spoke he waved his hand round the room, and then pointed to the grounds outside.

"Silverbel!" she cried; "but I wrote to you and told you the place was in the market. I even sent you a cablegram. Oh, of course, I forgot, you rushed away from Brisbane in a hurry. You received the other cablegram about little Sibyl?"

"Yes, I received the other cablegram, and, as you say, I rushed home. But why are you here? Have you taken the house for the season, or what?"

Mrs. Ogilvie gave an excited scream, ending off in a laugh.

"Why, we have bought Silverbel," she cried; "you are, you must be pleased. Mr. Acland lent me enough money for the first deposit, and you have just come back in time, my dear Phil, to pay the final sum due at the end of October, eighteen thousand pounds. Quite a trifle compared to the fortune you must have brought back with you. Then, of course, there is also the furniture to be paid for, but the tradespeople are quite willing to wait. We are rich, dear Phil, and I am so happy about it."

"Rich!" he answered. He did not say another word for a moment, then he went slowly up to his wife, and took her hand.

"Mildred," he said slowly, "do you realize—do you at all realize the fact that the child is dying?"

"Nonsense," she answered, starting back.

"The child is dying," repeated Ogilvie, "and when the child dies, any motive that I ever had for amassing gold, or any of those things which are considered essential to the worldly man's happiness, *goes out.* After the child is taken, I have no desire to live as a wealthy man, as a man of society, as a man of means. Life to me is reduced to the smallest possible modicum of interest. When I went to Queensland, I went there because I wished to secure money for the child. I did bitterly wrong, and God is punishing me, but I sinned for her sake . . . I now repent of my sin, and repentence means——"

"What?" she asked, looking at him with round dilated eyes.

"Restitution," he replied; "all the restitution that lies in my power."

"You—you terrify me," said Mrs. Ogilvie; "what are you talking about? Restitution! What have you to give back?"

"Listen, and I will explain. You knew, Mildred, oh, yes, you knew it well enough, that I went to Australia on no honourable mission. You did not care to inquire, you hid yourself behind a veil of pretended ignorance; but you *knew*, yes, you did, and you dare not deny it, that I went to Queensland to commit a crime. It would implicate others if I were to explain things more fully. I will not implicate others, I will stand alone now, in this bitter moment when the fruit of my sin is brought home to me. I will bear the responsibility of my own sin. I will not drag anybody else down in my fall, but it is sufficient for you to know, Mildred, that the Lombard Deeps Mine as a speculation is worthless."

"Worthless!" she cried, "impossible!"

"Worthless," he repeated.

"Then why, why did you send a cablegram to say the mine was full of gold? Lord Grayleigh told me he had received such a message from you."

"I told a dastardly lie, which I am about to put straight."

"But, but," she began, her lips white, her eyes shining, "if you do not explain away your lie (oh, Phil, it is such an ugly word), if you do not explain it away, could not the company be floated?"

"It could, and the directors could reap a fortune by means of it. Do you understand, Mildred, what that implies?"

"Do I understand?" she replied. "No, I was always a poor little woman who had no head for figures."

"Nevertheless you will, I think, take it in when I explain. You are not quite so stupid as you make yourself out. The directors and I could make a fortune—it would be easy, for there is enough gold in the mine to last for at least six months, and the public are credulous, and can be taken in. We should make our fortunes out of the widows and orphans, out of the savings of the poor clerks, and from the clergyman's tiny stipend. We could sweep in their little earnings, and aggrandise our own wealth and importance, and *lose our souls.* Yes, Mildred, we could, but we won't. I shall prevent that. I have a task before me which will save this foullest crime from being committed."

Mrs. Ogilvie dropped into a chair; she burst into hysterical weeping. Ogilvie stood near the window. After a pause, she looked up.

"What you say can't be true, Phil. Oh, Phil, darling, do have mercy."

"How?" he asked.

"Don't do anything so mad, so rash. You always had such a queer, troublesome sort of conscience. Phil, I cannot stand poverty, I cannot stand being dragged down; I must have this place, I have set my heart on it."

He came up to her and took both her hands.

"Is it worth evil?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Is anything under the sun worth evil?" She made no answer. He dropped her hands and left the room.

CHAPTER XX.

Ogilvie went up to Sibyl. Suffering and love had taught him many lessons, amongst others those of absolute self-control. His face was smiling and calm as he crossed the room, bent over the child and kissed her. Those blue eyes of hers, always so full of penetration and of knowledge, which was not all this earth, could detect no sorrow in her father's.

"I must go to town, I shall be away for as short a time as possible. As soon as I come back I will come to you," he said. "Look after her, please, Miss Winstead. If you cannot remain in the room, send Nurse. Now, don't tire yourself, my little love. Remember that father will be back very soon."

"Don't hurry, father darling," replied Sibyl, "'cos I am quite happy thinking about you, even if you are not here."

He went away, ran downstairs, put on his hat and went out. His wife was standing in the porch.

"One moment, Phil," she called, "where are you going?"

"To town."

"To do what?"

"To do what I said," he answered, and he gave her a strange look, which frightened her, and caused her to fall back against the wall.

He disappeared down the avenue, she sank into a chair and began to weep. She was thoroughly miserable and frightened. Philip had returned, but all pleasant golden dreams were shattered, for although he had sent a cablegram to Lord Grayleigh, saying that all was well, better than well, his conscience was speaking to him, that troublesome terrible conscience of his, and he was about to destroy his own work.

"What fearful creatures men with consciences are," moaned Mrs. Ogilvie.

Meanwhile Ogilvie walked quickly up the avenue. Just at the gates he met an old couple who were coming in. They were a queer looking old pair, dressed in old-fashioned style. Ogilvie did not know them, but the woman paused when she saw him, came forward, dropped a curtsey and said:

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"What can I do for you?" said Ogilvie. He tried to speak courteously, but this delay, and the presence of the old couple whose names he did not even know, irritated him.

"If you please, sir, you are Mr. Ogilvie?"

"That is my name."

"We know you," continued the old woman, "by the likeness to your little daughter."

The mention of Sibyl caused Ogilvie now to regard them more attentively.

"May I inquire your names?" he asked.

"Holman, sir," said the woman. "This is my husband, sir. We heard only yesterday of dear little Missie's illness, and we couldn't rest until we came to inquire after her. We greatly 'opes, sir, that the dear little lamb is better. We thought you wouldn't mind if we asked."

"By no means," answered Ogilvie. "Any friends of Sibyl's, any real friends, are of interest to me."

He paused and looked into the old woman's face.

"She's better, ain't she, dear lamb?" asked Mrs. Holman.

Ogilvie shook his head; it was a quick movement, his face was very white, his lips opened but no words came. The next instant he had hurried down the road leaving the old pair looking after him.

Mrs. Holman caught her husband's hand.

"What do it mean, John?" she asked, "what do it mean?"

"We had best go to the house and find out," was Holman's response.

"Yes, we had best," replied Mrs. Holman; "but, John, I take it that it means the worst. The little lamb was too good for this earth. I always said it, John, always."

"Come to the house and let's find out," said Holman again.

He took his old wife's hand, and the strange-looking pair walked down the avenue. Presently they found themselves standing outside the pretty old-fashioned porch of lovely Silverbel. They did not know as they walked that they were in full view of one of the windows of the Chamber of Peace, and that eager blue eyes were watching them, eager eyes which filled with love and longing when they gazed at them.

"Miss Winstead!" cried little Sibyl.

"What is it, dear?" asked the governess.

Sibyl had been silent for nearly a quarter of an hour, and Miss Winstead, tired with the bazaar and many other things, had been falling into a doze. The sudden excitement in Sibyl's voice now arrested her attention.

"Oh, Miss Winstead, they have come."

"Who have come, dear?"

"The Holmans, the darlings! I saw them walking down the avenue. Oh, I should so like to see them. Will you go down and bring them up? Please do."

"But the doctor said you were to be quiet, and not excite yourself."

"What does it matter whether I incite myself or not? Please, please let me see the Holmans."

"Yes, dear," replied Miss Winstead. She left the room and went downstairs. As she entered the central hall she suddenly found herself listening to an animated conversation.

"Now, my good people," said Mrs. Ogilvie's voice, raised high and clear, "you will be kind enough to return to town immediately. The child is ill, but we hope soon to have her better. See her, did you say, my good woman? certainly not. I shall be pleased to offer you refreshment if you will go round to the housekeeper's entrance, but you must take the next train to town, you cannot see the child."

"If you please, Mrs. Ogilvie," here interrupted Miss Winstead, coming forward. "Sibyl noticed Mr. and Mrs. Holman as they walked down the avenue, and is very much pleased and delighted at their coming to see her, and wants to know if they may come up at once and have a talk with her?"

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Ogilvie; "I really must give the child another bedroom, this sort of thing is so bad for her. It is small wonder the darling does not get back her health—the dreadful way in which she is over-excited and injudiciously treated. Really, my good folks, I wish you would go back to town and not make mischief."

"But if the little lady wishes?" began Mrs. Holman, in a timid voice, tears trembling on her eyelids.

"Sibyl certainly does wish to see you," said Miss Winstead in a grave voice. "I think, Mrs. Ogilvie," she added, "it would be a pity to refuse her. I happen to know Mr. and Mrs. Holman pretty well, and I do not think they will injure dear little Sibyl. If you will both promise to come upstairs quietly," continued Miss Winstead, "and not express sorrow when you see her, for she is much changed, and will endeavour to speak cheerfully, you will do her good, not harm."

"Oh, yes, we'll speak cheerfully," said Holman; "we know the ways of dear little Miss. If so be that she would see us, it would be a great gratification, Madam, and we will give you our word that we will not injure your little daughter."

"Very well," said Mrs. Ogilvie, waving her hand. "My opinion is never taken in this house, nor my wishes consulted. I pass the responsibility on to you, Miss Winstead. When the child's father returns and finds that you have acted as you have done you will have to answer to him. I wash my hands of the matter."

Mrs. Ogilvie went out on to the lawn.

"The day is improving," she thought. She glanced up at the sky. "It certainly is miserable at home, and everyone talks nonsense about Sibyl. I shall really take a drive and go and see the Le Stranges. I cannot stand the gloom of the house. The dear child is getting better fast, there is not the least doubt of it, and why Phil should talk as he does, and in particular why he should speak as if we were paupers is past bearing. Lose Silverbel! I certainly will not submit to that."

So the much aggrieved wife went round in the direction of the stables, gave orders that the pony trap was to be got ready for her, and soon afterwards was on her way to the Le Stranges. By the time she reached that gay and somewhat festive household, she herself was as merry and hopeful as usual.

Meanwhile Miss Winstead took the Holmans upstairs.

"You must be prepared for a very great change," said Miss Winstead, "but you will not show her that you notice it. She is very sweet and very happy, and I do not think anyone need be over-sorry about her."

Miss Winstead's own voice trembled. The

next moment she opened the door of the Chamber of Peace, and the old-fashioned pair from whom Sibyl had bought so many dusty toys stood before her.

"Eh, my little love, and how are you, dearie?" said Mrs. Holman. She went forward, dropped on her knees by the bed, and took one of Sibyl's soft white hands. "Eh, dearie, and what can Mrs. Holman do for you?"

"How do you do, Mrs. Holman?" said Sibyl, in her weak but perfectly clear voice; "and how do you do, Mr. Holman? How very kind of you both to come to see me. Do you know I love you very much. I think of you so often. Won't you come to the other side of the bed, Mr. Holman, and won't you take a chair? My voice is apt to get tired if I talk too loud. I am very glad to see you both."

"Eh! but you look sweet," said Mrs. Holman. Mr. Holman now took his big handkerchief and blew his nose violently. After that precautionary act he felt better, as he expressed it, and no longer in danger of giving way. But Mrs. Holman never for a single instant thought of giving way. She had once long ago had a child of her own—a child who died when young—and she had sat by that dying child's bed and never once given expression to her feelings. So why should she now grieve little Sibyl by showing undue sorrow?

"It is nice to look at you, dearie," she repeated, "and what a pretty room you have, my love."

"Everything is beautiful," said little Sibyl, "everything in all the world, and I love you so much."

"To be sure, darling, and so do Holman and I love you."

"Whisper," said Sibyl, "bend a little nearer, my voice gets so very tired. Have you kept your hundred pounds quite safe?"

"Yes, darling, but we won't talk of money now."

"Only," said Sibyl, "when the gold comes from the mine *you'll* be all right. Lord Grayleigh has wrote your name and Mr. Holman's in his notebook, and he has promised that you are to get some of the gold. You'll be able to have the shop in Buckingham Palace Road, and the children will come to you and buy your beautiful toys." She paused here and her little face turned white.

"You must not talk any more, dearie," said Mrs. Holman. "It's all right about the gold and everything else. All we want is for you to get well."

"I am getting well," answered Sibyl, but as she said the words a curious expression came into her eyes.

"You know," she said, as Mrs. Holman rose and took her hand before she went away, "that when we have wings we fly. I think my wings are coming; but oh, I love you, and you won't forget me when you have your big shop in Buckingham Palace Road?"

"We will never forget you, dearie," said Mrs. Holman, and then she stooped and kissed the child.

"Come, Holman," she said.

"If I might," said old Holman, straightening himself and looking very solemn, "if I might have the great privilege of kissing little Missie's hand afore I go."

"Oh, indeed, you may," said Sibyl.

A moment later the old pair were seen going slowly down the avenue.

"Blessed darling, her wings are very near, I'm thinking," said Mrs. Holman. She was sobbing now, although she had not sobbed in the sick room.

"Queer woman, the mother," said Holman. "We'll get back to town, wife; I'm wonderful upset."

"We'll never sell no more of the dusty toys to no other little children," said Mrs. Holman, and she wept behind her handkerchief.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ogilvie went straight to town. When he arrived at Victoria he took a hansom and drove to the house of the great doctor who had last seen Sibyl. Sir Henry Powell was at home. Ogilvie sent in his card and was admitted almost immediately into his presence. He asked a few questions, they were straight and to the point, and to the point did the specialist reply. His last words were:

"It is a question of time; but the end may come at any moment. There never was any hope from the beginning. From the first it was a matter of days and weeks, I did not know when I first saw your little daughter that she could live even as long as she has done, but the injury to the spine was low down, which doubtless accounts for this fact."

Ogilvie bowed, offered a fee, which Sir Henry refused, and left the house. Although he had just received the blow which he expected to receive, he felt strangely quiet, his troublesome heart was not troublesome any longer. There was no excitement whatever about him; he had never felt so calm in all his life before. He knew well that, as far as earthly success and earthly hope and earthly joy went, he was coming to the end of the ways. He knew that he had strength for the task which lay before him.

He went to the nearest telegraph office and sent three telegrams to Lord Grayleigh. He pre-paid the answers of each, sending one to Grayleigh's Club, another to his house in town, and another to Grayleigh Manor. The contents of each were identical.

"Wire immediately the next meeting of the directors of the Lombard Deeps."

He gave as the address to which the reply was to be sent his own house in Belgrave Square.

Having done this he paid a visit to his solicitor, Mr. Acland. Acland did not know that he had come back, and was unfeignedly glad to see him, but when he observed the expression on his friend's face he started and said:

"My dear fellow, you don't look the better for your trip; I am sorry to see you so broken down."

"I have a good deal to try me," said Ogilvie; "please do not discuss *my* looks. It does not matter whether I am ill or well. I have much to do and must do my work quickly. You have heard, of course, about the child?"

"Of her accident?" exclaimed Acland; "yes, her mother wrote to me some time ago—she had a fall from her pony?"

"She had."

"Take a chair, won't you, Ogilvie?"

Ogilvie dropped into one. Acland looked at him and then said, slowly:

"I judged from Mrs. Ogilvie's note that there was nothing serious the matter. I hope I am not mistaken?"

"You are mistaken," replied Ogilvie; "but I cannot quite bear to discuss this matter. Shall we enter at once on the real object of my visit?"

"Certainly," said Acland.

A clerk entered the room. "Leave us," said Acland to the man, "and say to any inquirers that I am particularly engaged. Now, Ogilvie," he added as the clerk withdrew, "I am quite at your service."

"Thank you. There is a little business which has just come to my ears, and which I wish to arrange quickly. My wife tells me that she has borrowed two thousand pounds from you in order to pay a deposit on the place on the Thames called Silverbel."

"Yes, the place where your wife is now staying."

"Exactly."

"I hope you approve of Silverbel, Ogilvie;

it is really cheap at the price; and, of course, everyone knows that you have returned a very rich man. It would have been pleasanter for me had you been at home when the purchase was made, but Mrs. Ogilvie was insistent. She had taken a strong fancy to the place. There were several other less expensive country places in the market, but the only one which would please her was Silverbel. I cabled to you, but got no reply. Your wife implored me to act, and I lent her the deposit. The purchase must be completed at the end of October, in about a month from now. I hope you don't blame me, Ogilvie?"

"I don't blame you—I understand my wife. It would have been difficult to refuse her. Of course, had you done so matters might have been a little easier for me now. As it is, I will pay you back the deposit. I have my cheque-book with me."

"What do you mean?"

"I should like to write a cheque for you now. I must get this matter put straight, and, Acland, you must find another purchaser."

"Not really!" cried Mr. Acland. "The place is beautiful, and cheap at the price, and you have come back a rich man."

"On the contrary, I have returned to England practically a pauper."

"No!" cried Mr. Acland; "but the report of the Lombard Deeps——"

"Hush, you will know all soon. It is sufficient for you at present to receive the news in all confidence that I am a ruined man. Not that it matters. There will be a trifle for my wife—nothing else concerns me. May I fill in this cheque?"

"You can do so, of course," replied Acland. "I shall receive the money in full sooner or later from the other purchaser, and then you can have it back."

"It would be a satisfaction to me, however, to pay you the deposit you lent my wife at once."

"Very well."

Ogilvie filled in a cheque for two thousand pounds.

"You had better see Mrs. Ogilvie with regard to this," he said as he stood up. "You transacted the business with her, and you must break to her what I have already done; but what I fear, she fails to believe that the purchase cannot possibly go on. It will not be in my power, Acland, to complete it, even if I should be alive at the time."

"I know another man only too anxious to purchase," said Acland; "but I am deeply sorry for you—your child so ill, your own mission to Queensland a failure."

"Yes, quite a failure. I won't detain you any longer now. I may need your services again presently."

Ogilvie went from the lawyer's house straight to his own in Belgrave Square. It was in the hands of a caretaker. A seedy-looking man in a rusty black coat opened the door. He did not know Olgivie.

"I am the master," said Ogilvie; "let me in, please."

The man stood aside.

"Has a telegram come for me?"

"Yes, sir, five minutes ago."

Ogilvie tore it open, and read the contents.

"Meeting of directors at one o'clock to-morrow, at Cannon Street Hotel. Not necessary for you to be present unless you wish.

"GRAYLEIGH."

Ogilvie crushed up the telegram, and turned to the man.

"I shall sleep here to-night," Ogilvie said, "and shall be back in the course of the evening."

He then went to his bank. It was within half-an-hour of closing. He saw one of the managers who happened to be a friend of his. The manager welcomed him back with effusion, and then made the usual remark about his changed appearance.

Ogilvie put his troublesome questions aside.

"I had an interview with you just before I went to Queensland," he said, "and I then placed, with a special note for your instructions in case anything happened to me, a sum of money in the bank."

"A large sum, Ogilvie—ten thousand pounds."

"Yes, ten thousand pounds," repeated Ogilvie. "I want to withdraw the money."

"It is a considerable sum to withdraw at once, but as it is not on deposit you can have it."

"I thought it only fair to give you a few hours' notice. I shall call for it to-morrow about ten o'clock."

"Do you wish to take it in a cheque?"

"I think not, I should prefer notes." Ogilvie added a few more words, and then went back to his own house.

At last everything was in train. He uttered a sigh of relief. The house looked gloomy and dismantled, but for that very reason it suited his feelings. Some of the furniture had been removed to Silverbel, and the place was dusty. His study in particular looked forbidding, some ashes from the last fire ever made there still remained in the grate. He wondered if anyone had ever entered the study since he last sat there and struggled with temptation and yielded to it.

He went up to his own room, which had been hastily prepared for him, and looked around him in a forlorn way. He then quickly mounted another flight of stairs, and found himself at last in the room where his little daughter used to sleep. The moment he entered this room he was conscious of a sensation of comfort. The worldliness of all the rest of the house fell away in this sweet, simply-furnished chamber. He sat down near the little empty bed, pressed his hand over his eyes, and gave himself up to thought.

Nobody knew how long he sat there. The caretaker and his wife took no notice. They were busy down in the kitchen. It mattered nothing at all to them whether Ogilvie were in the house or not. He breathed a conscious sigh of relief. He was glad to be alone, and the spirit of his little daughter seemed close to him. He had something hard to go through, and terrible agony would be his as he accomplished his task. He knew that he should have to walk through fire, and the fire would not be brief nor quickly over. Step by step his wounded feet must tread. By no other road was there redemption. He did not shirk the inevitable. On the contrary, his mind was made up.

"By no other road can I clasp her hand in the Eternity which lies beyond this present life," he thought. "I deserve the pain and the shame, I deserve all. There are times when a man comes face to face with God. It is fearful when his God is angry with him. My God is angry—the pains of hell take hold of me."

He walked to the window and looked out. It is doubtful if he saw much. Suddenly beside the little empty bed he fell on his knees, buried his face in his hands and a sob rose to his throat.

* * * * * *

On the following day, shortly before one o'clock, the directors of the Lombard Deeps Company assembled in one of the big rooms of the Cannon Street Hotel. Lord Grayleigh, the Chairman, had not yet arrived. The rest of the directors sat round a long green baize table and talked eagerly one to the other. They formed a notable gathering, including many of the astutest financiers in the City. As they sat and waited for Grayleigh to appear, they eagerly discussed the prospects of the new venture. While they talked their spirits rose, and had any outside spectator been present he would have guessed that they had already made up their minds to an enormous success.

Just on the stroke of one Grayleigh, carrying a roll of documents in his hand, entered the room. There was a lull in the conversation as he nodded to one and another of his acquaintances, went quickly up the room and took his seat at the head of the table. Here he arranged his papers and held a short consultation with the secretary, a tall man of about fifty years of age. There was a short pause and then Lord Grayleigh rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he began, "although, as you know, I have been and am still chairman of several companies, I can say without hesitation that never have I presided at a meeting of the directors of any company before which had such brilliant prospects. It is my firm conviction, and I hope to impress you all with a similar feeling, that the Lombard Deeps Mining Company has a great career before it."

Expressions of satisfaction rose from one or two present.

Lord Grayleigh proceeded: "This I can frankly say is largely due to our having secured the services of Mr. Philip Ogilvie as our assayer, but I regret to have to tell you all that, although he has returned to England, he is not likely to be present to-day. A very serious domestic calamity which ought to claim your deepest sympathy is the cause of his absence, but his report in detail I shall now have the pleasure of submitting to you."

Here Lord Grayleigh took up the document which had been signed by Ogilvie and Rycroft at the Warahoo Hotel at Brisbane. He proceeded to read it aloud, emphasising the words which spoke of the value of the veins of gold beneath the alluvial deposit.

"This report," he said in conclusion, "is vouched for by the signatures of my friend Ogilvie and also by James Rycroft, who is nearly as well known in Queensland as Ogilvie is in London."

As detail after detail of the brilliantly worded document which Ogilvie and Rycroft had compounded with such skill, fell upon the ears of Lord Grayleigh's audience, satisfaction not unmixed with avarice lit up the eyes of many. Accustomed as most of these men were to assayers' reports, what they now listened to unfeignedly astonished them. There was a great silence in the room, and not the slightest word from Lord Grayleigh's clear voice was lost.

When he had finished he laid the document on the table and was just about, as he expressed it, to proceed to business when a movement at the door caused all to turn their heads. Ogilvie had unexpectedly entered the room.

Cries of welcome greeted him and many hands were stretched out. He contented himself, however with bowing slightly, and going up the room handed Lord Grayleigh a packet.

"Don't open it now," he said in a low voice, "it is for yourself, and carries its own explanation with it."

He then turned and faced the directors. There was something about his demeanour and an indescribable look on his face, which caused the murmurs of applause to die away and silence once more to fill the room.

Lord Grayleigh slipped the small packet into his pocket and also rose to his feet.

Ogilvie's attitude and manner disturbed him. A sensation as though of coming calamity seemed to weigh the air. Lord Grayleigh was the first to speak.

"We are all glad to welcome you back, Ogilvie," he said. "In more senses than one we are pleased that you are able to be present just now. I have just been reading your report to these gentlemen. I had finished it when you entered the room."

"It is an admirable and brilliant account of the mine, Mr. Ogilvie," said a director from the far end of the table. "I congratulate you not only on the good news it contains, but on the excellent manner in which you have put details together. The Lombard Deeps will be the best thing in the market, and we shall not need for capital to work the mine to the fullest extent."

"Will you permit me to look at my report for a moment, Lord Grayleigh?" said Ogilvie in a grave tone.

Grayleigh gave it to him. Ogilvie took it in his hand.

"I have come here to-day," he said, "to speak for a moment,"—his voice was husky, he cleared his throat and went on—"to perform a painful business, to set wrong right. I am prepared, gentlemen, for your opprobrium. You think well of me now, you will not do so long. I have come here to speak to you of that——"

"Sit down," said Grayleigh's voice behind him. "You must be mad. Remember yourself." He laid his hand on Ogilvie's arm. Ogilvie shook it off.

"I can tell you, gentlemen, what I have come to say in a few words," he continued. "This report which I drew up, and which I signed, is as *false as hell.*"

"False?" echoed a voice in the distance, a thin voice from a foreign-looking man. "Impossible!"

"It is false," continued Ogilvie. "I wrote the report and I ought to know. I spent three weeks at the Lombard Deeps Mine. There were no rich veins of gold; there was a certain alluvial deposit, which for a time, a few months, might yield five ounces to the ton. I wrote the report for a motive which no longer exists. God Himself smote me for my infamous work. Gentlemen, you can do with me exactly as you think fit, but this report, signed by me, shall never go before the world."

As he said the last words he hastily tore away his own signature, crushed it in his hand, and, crossing the room, threw it into a small fire which was burning in the grate.

This action was the signal for great excitement on the part of most of the directors. Others poured out floods of questions. Lord Grayleigh alone remained quietly seated in his chair, but his face was white, and for the time he was scarcely conscious of what he was doing.

"I have no excuse to offer," continued Ogilvie, "and I refuse to inculpate anyone with myself in this matter. This was my own concern, I thought out the report, I worded it, I signed it. Rycroft was more or less my tool. In the moment of my so-called victory God smote me. You can do with me just as you please, but the Lombard Deeps Company must collapse. I have nothing further to say."

He left the room, dropping the now worthless document on to the table as he did so. No one interrupted him or prevented his exit. As his footsteps died away on the stairs the discomfited and astonished directors looked one at the other.

" What is the meaning of it all," said one, going up to Grayleigh; " you are chairman, and you ought to know? "

Grayleigh shook himself and stood up.

" This must be a brief madness," he said; " there is no other way to account for it. Ogilvie of all men under the sun! Gentlemen, you know his character, you know what his name was worth as our engineer, but there is one other thing you do not know. The poor fellow has a child, only one, to whom he is devoted. I heard this morning that the child is dying. Under such circumstances his mind may have been unhinged. Let me follow him. I will return after I have said a word to him."

The chairman left the room, ran quickly downstairs and out into the street. Ogilvie had hailed a hansom and was getting into it.

" One moment first," said Grayleigh.

" What do you want? " asked Ogilvie.

" An explanation."

" I gave it upstairs."

" You are mad—you are mad."

" On the contrary, I believe that I am sane—sane at last. I grant you I was mad when I listened to you in the summer; mad when I signed the report, but I am sane now."

"What packet was that you gave me?"

"Your money back."

"The ten thousand pounds?"

"Yes; I did not want it. I have delivered my soul, and nothing else matters."

"Tell me at least one thing. Is this strange action on your part owing to the child's accident?"

"It is. I was going headlong down to hell, but God, through her, has pulled me up short. Gold is utterly valueless to me now. The child is dying, and I cannot part with her for all eternity. You can draw your own conclusions."

As Ogilvie spoke he shook Grayleigh's detaining hand from his arm. The chairman of the Lombard Deeps Company stood still for a moment, then returned to the directors.

As Grayleigh walked slowly upstairs he had a moment's conflict with his own conscience. In one thing at least Ogilvie was generous. He had not dragged Lord Grayleigh to the earth in his own fall. The affair of the ten thousand pounds was known to no one else.

"He fell, and I caused him to fall," thought Lord Grayleigh. "In the moment of his fall, if I were even half a man, I would stand by him and acknowledge my share in the matter. But no; where would be the use? I cannot drag my children through the mire. Poor Ogilvie is losing his child, and for him practically life is over."

Grayleigh re-entered the room where the directors waited for him.

"I saw Ogilvie just now," he said, "and he sticks to his story. I fear, too, that I was wrong in my conjecture with regard to his madness. He must have had a temporary madness when he drew up and signed the false report. I suppose we ought to consider ourselves lucky."

"At least the widows and orphans won't be ruined," said one of the directors, a thin-faced anxious looking man. "Well, of course, Lord Grayleigh, we must all wash our hands of this."

"We must do so advisedly," was Grayleigh's remark; "remember we have gone far. Remember the cablegram was not kept too secret, and the knowledge of the excellent report sent by Ogilvie has got to the ears of one or two city editors. He must give out that there was a misunderstanding as to the value of the mine."

"And what of Ogilvie himself?" said an angry looking man. "Such infamous conduct requires stringent measures. Do you gentlemen share my views?"

One or two did, but most protested against dragging Ogilvie's story too prominently into the light of day.

"It may reflect on ourselves," said one or two. "It is just possible there may be some people who will not believe that he was alone in this matter."

Lord Grayleigh was the last to speak.

"If I were you, gentlemen," he said moodily, "I would leave Ogilvie to his God."

CHAPTER XXII.

"Philip!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, as he re-entered pretty Silverbel about four o'clock that afternoon, "I have just had an extraordinary telegram from our lawyer, Mr. Acland."

Ogilvie looked full at her but did not speak.

"How strangely tired and worn you look," she replied; "what can be the matter with you. Sometimes, when I think of you and the extraordinary way in which you are acting, I come to the conclusion that your brain cannot be right."

"You are wrong there, Mildred. There was a time when not only my brain but all my moral qualities were affected, but I believe these things are put right at last."

He gave a hollow laugh.

"I am enjoying, for the first time for many months, the applause of an approving conscience," he continued; "that is something to live for."

"Have you done anything rash, Philip?"

"I have done something which my conscience justifies. Now what about the telegram from Acland?"

"He is coming here this evening to have a talk with me. What can he have to say?"

"Doubtless his visit is accounted for by an interview I had with him yesterday. I asked him to explain matters to you, as you and he conducted the business with regard to this place together. Mildred, Silverbel must be given up."

Her face grew red with passion, she felt inclined to stamp her foot.

"It cannot be," she cried, "we have already paid two thousand pounds deposit."

"That money was returned by me to Acland yesterday. He has doubtless heard of another purchaser. It will be a lucky thing for us, Mildred, if he takes the furniture as well as the place. Pray don't keep me now."

She gave a sharp cry and flung herself into a chair. Ogilvie paused as if to speak to her, then changed his mind and went slowly upstairs. On the landing outside Sibyl's door he paused for a moment, struggling with himself.

"The bitterness of death lies before me," he muttered, for he knew that difficult as was the task which he had accomplished that morning at the Cannon Street Hotel, terrible as was the moment when he stood before his fellow-men and branded himself as a felon, these things were nothing, nothing at all to that which now lay before him, for God demanded something more of the man, he must open the eyes of the child who worshipped him. The thought of this awful task almost paralysed him; his heart beat with heavy throbs and the moisture stood on his forehead. One look at Sibyl, however, lying whiter and sweeter than ever in her little bed, restored to him that marvellous self-control which love alone can give.

Nurse was in the room, and it was evident that Nurse had been having a bout of crying. Her eyelids were red. She turned when she saw her master, went up to him and shook her head.

"Leave us for a little, Nurse," said Ogilvie.

She went away at once.

Ogilvie now approached the bed, dropped into a chair and took one of Sibyl's hands.

"You have been a long time away, father," said the child.

"I have, my darling, I had a great deal to do."

"Business, father?"

"Yes, dearest, important business."

"You don't look well," said Sibyl. She gazed at him apprehensively, her blue eyes opened wide, and a spasm of pain flitted across her brow.

"I have had a hard time," said the man, "and now, my little girl, I have come to you, to you, my dearest, to perform the hardest task of my life."

"To me, father? The hardest task of your life?"

"Yes, my little daughter, I have something to say to you."

"Something bad?" asked Sibyl.

"Something very bad."

Sibyl shut her eyes for a minute, then she opened them and looked steadily at her father, her childish lips became slightly compressed, it was as if a world of strength suddenly entered her little frame, as though, dying as she was, she was bracing herself to endure.

"I am very sorry," she said. "I love you so much. What is it, darlingest father?"

"Let me hold your hand," he said. "It will be easier for me to tell you something while I hold your little white hand."

She gave it to him. He clasped it in both of his, bent forward, and began to speak.

"At the moment little Sibyl, when the cablegram which told me of your accident was put into my hand, I had just done something so wicked, so terrible, that God Himself, God Almighty, rose up and smote me."

"I don't understand," said the child.

"I will explain. The cablegram told me that you were ill, very ill. I wanted to undo what I had done, but it was too late. I hurried back to you. God came with me on board the ship. God came, and He was angry; I had a terrible time."

"Still I do not understand," repeated Sibyl.

"Let me speak, my dear girl. I reached home, and I saw you, and then a temptation came to me. I wanted us both, you and I, to be happy together for two days. I knew that at the end of that time I must open your eyes."

"Oh, we were happy!" said the child.

"Yes, for those two days we had peace, and we were, as you say, happy. I put away from me the thought of that which was before me, but I knew that it must come. It has come, Sibyl. The peace has been changed to storm; and now, little girl, I am in the midst of the tempest; the agony I feel in having to tell you this no words can explain."

"I wish you would try and 'splain all the same," said Sibyl in a weak, very weak voice.

"I will, I must; it is wrong of me to torture you."

"It's only 'cos of you yourself," she murmured.

"Listen, my darling. You have often given thoughts to the Lombard Deeps Mine."

"Oh, yes." She raised herself a little on her pillow, and tried to speak more cheerfully. "I have thought of it, the mine full, full of gold, and all the people so happy."

Her voice grew quite animated.

"Any special people, dearest?"

"So many," she replied. "I told Lord Grayleigh, and he put their names in his note-book. There's Mr. and Mrs. Holman, the people who keep the toy-shop; she has a hundred pounds, and she wants to buy some of the gold."

"The old pair I saw coming to see you yesterday? Are they the Holmans? Yes, I remember they told me that was their name."

"They came, father. I love 'em so much; and there's Mr. Rochester and Lady Helen, they want to marry. It's a secret, but you may know. And Nurse, she wants some of the gold, 'cos her eyes ache, and you sent a cablegram, father, and said the gold was there; it's all right."

"No, Sibyl, it is all wrong; the gold is not in the mine."

"But you sent a cablegram."

"I did."

"And you said it was there."

"I did."

She paused and looked at him; her eyes grew full of pain; the pain reached agony point.

"You said it?"

"I did worse," said the man. He stood up, folded his arms across his chest, and looked down at her. "I did worse, and to tell you is my punishment. I not only sent that cablegram, but I wrote an account of the mine, a false account, false as my false heart was, Sibyl, and I signed it with my name, for the gold I said was in the mine was not there."

"Why did you do it, father?"

"Because I was a scoundrel."

"What's that?" asked Sibyl.

"A bad man."

"No," said the child, "no, you was always my most perfect——"

"You thought so, darling; you were wrong. Even when I went to Queensland I was far from that. I could not bid you good-bye before I went, because of the sin which I was about to commit. I committed the sin, I dropped away from honour, I let goodness go. I did that which could never, never under any circumstances be worth doing, for there is nothing worth evil, there is nothing worth sin, I see it now."

"Then you are sorry?"

"I have repented," he cried; "my God, I have repented," and he fell on his knees and covered his face. For the child's sake he kept back the sobs which rose to his throat.

Sibyl looked at the bent head, at the dark hair already sprinkled with grey. She lay quite still, there was not the slighest doubt that the shock was great. Ogilvie waited, longing, wondering if the little hand would touch his head, if the child would forgive him.

"She is so holy, so heavenly herself," he murmured; "is it possible that she can forgive? It must be a cruel shock to her."

The little white hand did not touch him. There was complete stillness in the room. At last he raised his eyes and looked at her. She looked steadily back at him.

"And so you was never perfect?" she said.

"Never."

"And was mother never perfect?"

"Not as you think of perfection, Sibyl, but we need not talk of her now. I have sinned far more deeply than your poor mother has ever done."

The puzzled expression grew deeper on Sibyl's face. An old memory of her mother returned to her. She saw again the scene, and recalled her mother's words, the words she had overheard, and which the mother had denied.

She was quite still for a full moment, the little clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly, then she said slowly:

"And Lord Jesus, isn't He perfect?"

Ogilvie started when he heard her words.

"Aye, He is perfect," he answered, "you are safe in trusting to Him. He is all that your dreams and all that your longings desire."

She smiled very faintly.

"Why did He come into the world?" was her next question.

"Don't you know that old story? Has no one told you?"

"Won't you tell me now, father?"

"The old story was that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

"Sinners," repeated Sibyl, "'cos He loved 'em?"

"Would He have done that for anything else, do you think?"

"I 'spect not," she replied, and again the faint smile filled her eyes.

"Then he loves *you*," she said after a moment. "He came from heaven 'cos of you."

"It seems like it, my little girl, and yet I cannot bring myself to believe that He can love me."

"Don't speak to me, father, for a minute; go away, and look out of the window, and come back when I call you."

He rose at once, crossed the room, and stood looking out. In a short time the feeble voice called him back.

"Father!" There was a change in the face, the look of pain had vanished, the sweet eyes were as peaceful as ever, and more clearly than ever did that amazing knowledge and comprehension fill them, which never belonged to this earth.

"Kneel down, father," said Sibyl.

He knelt.

Now she laid her little hand in his, and now she smiled at him, and now, as if she were strong and well again, she stroked his hand with her other hand, and at last she feebly raised the hand and pressed it to her lips.

"I am loving you so much," she said, "same as Jesus loves you, I think."

Then Ogilvie did give a sob. He checked it as it rose to his throat.

"It is all right," she contiued, "I love you. Jesus is perfect . . . and He loves you."

"But do you, Sibyl, really love me the same as ever?" he asked, and there was a note of incredulity in his voice.

"Seems to me I love you more'n ever," was her answer, and the next instant her soft arms encircled his neck, and he felt her kisses on his cheek.

But suddenly, without warning, there came a change. There was a catch in the eager quick breath, the arms relaxed their hold, the little head fell back on the pillow, the face almost rosy a moment back was now white, but the eyes were radiant and full of a wonderful astonished light.

"Why," cried Sibyl, "it's Lord Jesus! He has come. He is here, looking at me." She gazed towards the foot of the bed, her eyes were raised slightly upwards, each moment the ecstatic expression grew and grew in their depths.

"Oh, my beautiful Lord Jesus," she whispered. "Oh, take me." She tried to raise her arms and her eyes were fixed on a vision which Ogilvie could not see. There was just an instant of absolute stillness, then the clear voice spoke again.

"Take me, Lord Jesus Christ, but first, afore we go, kiss father, and tell him you love him."

The eager lips were still, but the light, too wonderful for this mortal life, continued to fill the eyes.

It seemed to Ogilvie that great wings encircled him, that he was wrapped in an infinite peace. Then it seemed also as if a kiss sweet beyond all sweetness brushed his lips.

The next instant all was cold and lonely.

CHAPTER XXIII.

There is such a thing in life as turning straight round and going the other way. This was what happened to Philip Ogilvie after the death of Sibyl. All his life hitherto he had been on the downward plane. He was now decidedly on the upward. The upward path was difficult, and his feet were tired and his spirits sore, and often he faltered and flagged and almost stopped, but he never once went back. He turned no look towards the easy way which leads to destruction, for at the top of the path which he was now climbing, he ever and always saw his child waiting for him, nor did he feel even here on earth that his spirit was really far from hers. Her influence still surrounded him—her voice spoke to him in the summer breeze—her face looked at him out of the flowers, and her smile met him in the sunshine.

He had a rough time to go through, but he endured everything for her sake. By degrees his worldly affairs were put into some sort of order, and so far as his friends and society went he vanished from view. But none of these things mattered to him now. He was living on earth it is true; but all the ordinary earth desires had died within him. The spiritual life, however, did not die. Day by day it grew stronger and braver, so it came to pass that his sympathies instead of dwindling and becoming small and narrow, widened, until once more he loved and once more he hoped.

He became very tolerant for others now, and especially was he tolerant to his wife.

He bore with her small ways, pitied her grief, admitted to himself that there were limits in her nature which no power could alter, and did his best to make her happy.

She mourned and grieved and grieved and mourned for that which meant nothing at all to him, but he was patient with her, and she owned to herself that she loved him more in his adversity than she had done in his prosperity.

For Sibyl's sake, too, Ogilvie roused himself to do what he could for her special friends. There was a tiny fund which he had once put aside for his child's education, and this he now spent in starting a shop for the Holmans in Buckingham Palace Road. He made them a present of the shop, and helped them to stock it with fresh toys. The old pair did well there, they prospered and their trade was good, but they never forgot Sibyl, and their favourite talk in the evenings as they sat side by side together was to revive memories of the little old shop and the child who used to buy the dusty toys.

As to Lord Grayleigh, Philip Ogilvie and he never met after that day outside the Cannon Street Hotel. The fact is, a gulf divided them; for although both men to a great extent repented of what they had done, yet there was a wide difference in their repentance, for one had acted with the full courage of his convictions, the other still led a life of honour before his fellowmen, but his heart was not straight with God.

Grayleigh and Ogilvie therefore, with the knowledge that each knew the innermost motives of the other, could not meet nor be friends. Nevertheless Sibyl had influenced Grayleigh. For her sake he ceased to be chairman of several somewhat shady companies, and lived more than he had done before in his own place, Grayleigh Manor, and surrounded by his children. He was scarcely heard to mention Sibyl's name after her death.

But amongst his treasures he still keeps that little old notebook in which she begged of him to enter her special wishes, and so much affected was he in his heart of hearts, by her childish words, that he used his utmost influence and got a good diplomatic appointment for Rochester, thus enabling him and Lady Helen to marry, although not by the means which Sibyl had suggested.

These things happened a few years ago, and Ogilvie is still alive, but, although he lives still on earth, he also waits on the verge of life, knowing that at any hour, any moment, day or night, the message may come for him to go, and in his dreams he believes that the first to meet him at the Gates will be the child he loves.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

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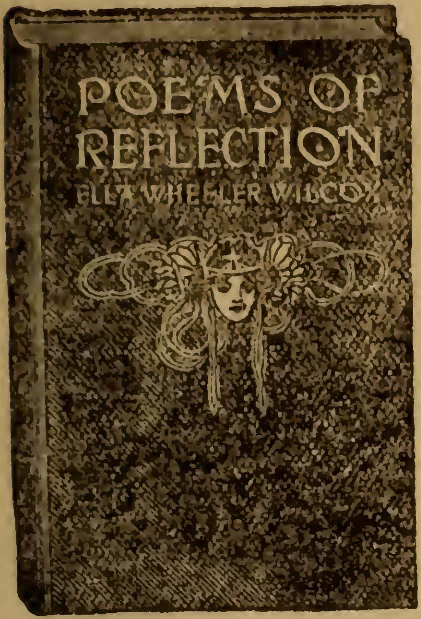

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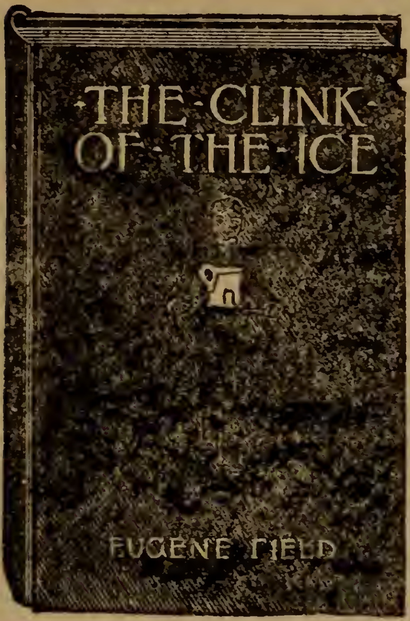

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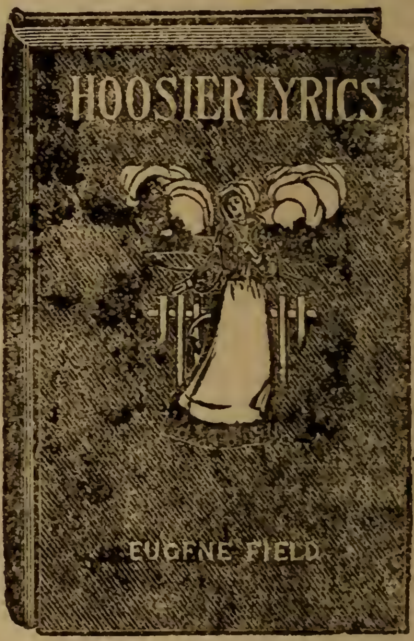

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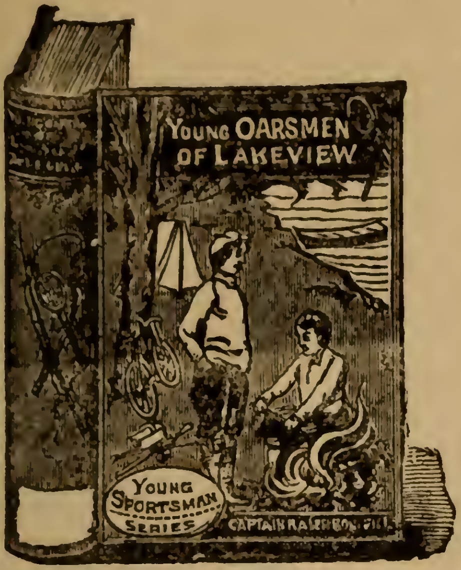
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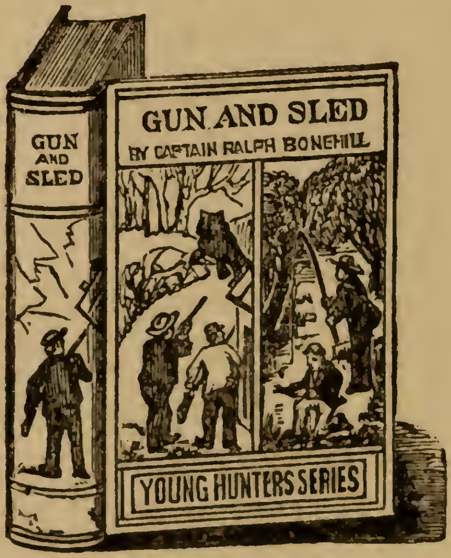
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